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Allegiances

~COPYRIGHT STATEMENT REGARDING MY WARRIORS FICS~
I am putting this here simply because it has become quite an issue lately. Please DO NOT use my original characters/clans/concepts in any of your Warriors fics. (This does not include warriors cats with the same names. I understand coincidences if we happened to pick the same names for our characters.) I work hard on my novels, and it is upsetting to witness a circumstance where the author feels they need to "borrow" ideas/characters from me because they're not creative enough. Simply stated, the Warriors world is big and complex enough for an author to be able to create his or her own characters/clans/plot. Thank you for your understanding.

~STATEMENT REGARDING GRAMMATICAL ERRORS AND COMMENTS~

Please REFRAIN from continually correcting typos and grammatical errors. I am a grammar nazi myself, and I understand some of you are too, but I have several published works and do not have time to correct EVERY error. Unless the error severely limits your understanding of the story, I will not be taking immediate action to fix these typos. Please REFRAIN from telling me "cats can't cry" and "cats can't blush" etc. These novels are a work of FICTION. I know cats can't cry and perform human-like characteristics; however, this is a work of fiction and is written in a way to convey emotion. I am sick and tired of getting comments like these because they detract from my work and make it seem like you care more about correcting typos/ (sorry) being a pompous know-it-all than reading and enjoying a work. Don't be surprised if I get sassy/sarcastic with you in the comments. I ask you refrain from making such comments on my work.

SNOWCLAN (Only Cats Mentioned in the Series):

LEADER--Cloudstar: white tom with blue eyes

DEPUTY--Thornfrost: golden tabby tom with blue eyes, blind in one eye

Mate: Mousestripe

MEDICINE CAT-- Spiritheart: dark gray tom

~APPRENTICE: None

WARRIORS:

Fernbranch: black tortoiseshell she-cat with gold patches, white paws, white chest

Mate: Mossheart

Pinethorn: mucky brown tom with white patches

Mate: Blueocean

Mousestripe: white she-cat with black spots and icy blue eyes

Mate: Thornfrost

Patchfur: white tom with gray tabby patches

Stormnight: silver blue tom with green eyes, missing fur on one thigh and patches of pelt

Mate: Cheetahwing

Graytail: silver blue tom with green eyes. Missing fur on paw and part of tail

Blueocean: silver-blue she-cat

Mate: Pinethorn

Tinypelt: tiny light gray she-cat

Mate: Moss-Eye

Moss-Eye: blind black tom with white markings

Mate: Tinypelt

Jayfur: russian blue tom with green eyes

Mate: Minnowfin

Minnowfin: gray tabby she-cat

Mate: Jayfur

Cheetahwing: spotted she-cat

Mate: Stormnight

QUEENS:

Splashleap: light gray she-cat with splash of white

Mate: Runninglegs

Kits: Spottedkit, Waterfallkit

Tasha: light gray tabby she-cat

Mate: Unknown

Kits: Springkit, Icekit, Summerkit

KITS:

Springkit: dark brown tabby she-cat

Summerkit: calico she-cat

Icekit: silver tabby tom

Spottedkit: white she-cat with black ears and tail

Waterfallkit: small silver she-cat

Lifekit: white she-cat with golden patches and blue eyes

Spottedkit:

ELDERS:

Mossheart: white tom with blue eyes and black on tips of ears

Mate: Fernbranch

CATS OUTSIDE THE CLAN:

Gooseleaf: gray and white tom with green eyes

NIGHTCLAN (Only Cats Mentioned in the Series):

LEADER--Silverstar: silver tabby she-cat with amber eyes

DEPUTY--Ashclaw:dark gray tom with blue eyes

Mate: Appleclaw

MEDICINE CAT-- Ambershine: calico she-cat

~APPRENTICE: Frostpaw: small, pure white she-cat

WARRIORS:

Snowdrop: white she-cat with strikingly pink nose

Appleclaw: ginger she-cat with green eyes

Mate: Ashclaw

Firelight: ginger tom with green eyes

Hailfrost: white tom with green eyes

Mate: Frostflight

Possumeye: white tom with gray spots

Mate: Daisyfeather

APPRENTICES:

Arcticpaw: white tom

QUEENS:

Daisyfeather: white and ginger she-cat with green eyes

Mate: Possumeye

Kits: Thymekit, Raspberrykit, Mangokit, Koikit, Windkit

Frostflight: small gray she-cat with blue eyes

Mate: Hailfrost

Kits: Expecting, Adoptive Mother of Lemonkit

KITS:

Raspberrykit: red she-cat with blue eyes

Thymekit: silvery-gray tom with twisted ear

Mangokit: bright ginger she-cat with brown colored star above eye, hazel eyes

Koikit: tortoiseshell she-cat

Windkit: white tom

Lemonkit: white she-cat with gold patches and blue eyes

ELDERS:

Bluefur: dark gray she-cat with white chest and green eyes

OAK'S TRIBE (Only Cats Mentioned in Series):

MALE LEADER--Oak: brown tabby tom

FEMALE LEADER-- Cherry Blossom: dark ginger tabby she-cat

HEALER--Berry: cream colored she-cat

PREGNANT/NURSING SHE-CATS:

Rain: gray tabby she-cat

Mate: Unknown

Kits: Storm, Mouse, Honey

KITS:

Storm: blue tom with green eyes

Honey: light ginger she-cat

Mouse: brown tabby she-cat

Salmon: white she-cat with gold patches and blue eyes

KITTYPETS:

Caramel: light brown tabby she-cat with a hint of ginger

Whiskers: ginger tabby tom with white belly

Holly: brown tabby she-cat

Polly: brown tabby she-cat

Tiger: ginger tabby tom

Hazelnut: light brown tabby she-cat

Snowflake: white she-cat

Sunrise: white she-cat with gold patches and blue eyes

Fawn:light brown tabby she-cat

Cracker: golden tabby tom

Anna: older brown tabby she-cat

Frog: older dark brown tabby tom

Boulder: light gray tom with green eyes

Prologue

~(IMPORTANT, but small, head's up: For those currently reading MoonClan's Return, it would be wise to finish that book before devouring into Shining of the Four. It does sort of spoil MoonClan's Return. If you haven't read the MoonClan series or don't plan to, go ahead. For those who are curious about the MoonClan series and might read it in the future, well, it's up to you if you want to continue reading. Thanks and sorry for the inconvenience)~

The StarClan cats had gathered in the meadow where a lovely stream slowly flowed through the beautiful area. Prey scampered nearby, though no cat hunted nor drank from the stream. This meeting was all too important.

Icestar sat in the meadow, the wind blowing at her blinding white pelt. Smokestar sat beside her, as well as Skycloud and Rosefur.

"Shouldn't we be focusing on the battle that is to take place very soon?" Rosefur asked Icestar.

Icestar shook her head. "Although the battle is important, something important is happening. Another prophecy is forming, one that was never meant to be made."

"But Shinypelt has almost fulfilled the original prophecy!" Smokestar argued. "How is there a new prophecy?"

"It is another about Shinypelt, and I can't seem to understand it very well," Icestar began to explain. "Once it happens, I'm sure we'll be able to conduct further research."

"Well, what is the prophecy?" Skycloud asked.

Icestar closed her eyes and took in a deep breath. "As the Moon's shine vanishes and the light burns out, another cat will be

lost. Four will come, all the same, but with different stories. The four must unite and rescue the lost cat and theirselves or else the Place of No Stars will gain a star..."

"The original prophecy, what is the original prophecy?" Rosefur immediately asked.

Before Icestar could reply, Smokestar spoke. "Evil will fall upon. Two will suffer. One as bright as light that shines throughout the forest will vanish evil for eternity. The one who shines will flicker out, and another light will shine."

"That is the original one that describes Shinypelt," Skycloud told them. "But if you look, it claims her light will fade, and another one's light will shine. Perhaps that is what the new prophecy is about."

"I cannot understand the new prophecy though," Icestar sighed. "It's something about a cat being lost and the Dark Forest."

"What can it mean?" Smokestar asked.

Suddenly, Rosefur froze. Every cat turned to her, awaiting what she would say. Rosefur gulped, then spoke. "I think the Dark Forest's powers are going to mix with StarClan's, and evil won't be vanished..."

The cries of cats rang through the SnowClan territory as the battle between MoonClan and the other clans continued. Left and right cats were dying, and blood drenched the ground. Some cats were beginning to wonder if it was really worth it to continue fighting, and if they should just forfit and let MoonClan win.

Shinypelt was in the crowd fighting alongside her clanmates. She watched as more cats died and more cats fell to the ground in pain. She looked up, noticing the BirdClan cats perched on a rock, only watching, not helping the cats.

"Cowards," she murmured.

None of this felt right though. They were supposed to win. StarClan was on their side. How could they not win?

Shinypelt froze, knowing what had to happen. It had been on her mind for awhile, and she did not want to go through with her plan, but now, it all made sense. This was what the prophecy meant.

Shinypelt rushed into the center of the battlefield yowling, "EVERYONE STOP FIGHTING!" she hissed.

Mousestripe, her mother, gazed at her with concerned blue eyes. "Shinypelt, what are you doing?!"

Shinypelt gazed at her mother as if she were to say good-bye. "I understand the prophecy now, Mother," she spoke. She looked over at Patchfur, her mate.

"Shinypelt, no, you can't," he begged, taking a step forward.

The fighting began to subside, and Shinypelt felt a horrible pain as Moonstar emerged in the corner as her Dark Forest-self.

"You can't defeat us!" she spat, beginning to laugh maliciously.

With all the courage she had, Shinypelt spoke, "Oh, but I can."

SnowClan cats stopped in fear as Shinypelt's pelt began to glow, blinding nearly every cat nearby.

They watched as Moonstar froze. "What the?!" she gasped.

Suddenly, Shinypelt was lifted into the air, her pelt glowing brighter. Her blue eyes flashed, just as they had done when Mousestripe had given birth to her. Moonstar's ear-deafening yowl rang through the battlefield when a giant flash lit up the entire forest.

Once the cats did regain their vision, every evil MoonClan cat was gone. How had they disappeared so quickly?

"WE'VE WON!" Cloudstar gasped, cheering. Before any cat could cheer though, Mousestripe let out a scream.

"Oh no," Stormpelt gasped. On the ground lay Shinypelt's limp body. Stormpelt ran to his sister's side, gasping.

"NO!" Patchfur shrieked, running to Shinypelt. He nudged the limp she-cat, though she did not move. It was no use. She was dead, and she had died protecting the clans.

Stormpelt gently touched his tail to his sobbing mother, and all cats looked at the ground in sadness, not knowing how deadly the price was for protecting the clans.

Before any cat could move again, another light came forward, lifting Shinypelt's dead body into the air.

"What's happening?!" Patchfur gasped.

Blue lights dazzled around Shinypelt until the light became too bright for the clan cats to witness. Once the light did fade, a small innocent kitten lay on the floor, her pelt of white and gold, and her eyes glowing blue.

"Sh-Shinypelt?" Patchfur asked, moving forward. Patchfur turned to Cloudstar in confusion, though the leader had the same expression as him. "Is this my kit or Shinypelt?"

Cloudstar shrugged. "I do not have all answers, but perhaps this kit is yours, Patchfur. What will you call her?" he asked.

Patchfur thought for a moment. "Lifekit because she represents new life." He picked up the small kit and together, the cats headed back to camp to be tended to.

Chapter 1

Cherry Blossom walked through the forest, guilt and despair filling her with each step she took. She had seen the flash that had gone through the entire forest, and she still wondered what had caused it.

She had heard cries of cats and bones of prey throughout these woods. It was no doubt that clan cats lived in these woods.

Cherry Blossom was not a clan cat, but more of a foreigner. Most clan cats would call her a "rogue" or a "loner", but in reality, there was not much different from her and clan cats.

Cherry Blossom lived with many others foreigners, though they were not a "clan". From time to time they would move from their home and travel together. Cherry Blossom was their queen, their leader, along with her mate, Oak, their king.

Cherry Blossom had heard about how clan cats would call their rulers a "leader" and they would possess nine lives, a gift from StarClan. Cherry Blossom did not believe in StarClan though. No cat in her group did.

All the cats in her group believed that when a cat died, they would be present in whatever object they were named after. For Cherry Blossom, her spirit would be present in the blossoms that bloomed every spring. Her mate, Oak, would be present in the tall oak trees. It was always passed down to every generation that a few cats have even heard their ancestors speak to them when they are near that certain object. Cherry Blossom had never witnessed this though. It was just a kit's tale.

Kits...Cherry Blossom's heart ached. She had been pregnant, about ready to give birth when the storm had come. She had been separated from her group members and had been stuck in these woods for several sunrises now, trying to find her way back home.

Cherry Blossom had given birth recently, though something had gone wrong with the birth, and her four kits had died, leaving her to mourn. She had buried them, knowing they would be with the other kittens who had not been named. Now once she did return home, she would have to tell Oak and the rest of the cats the terrible news. It had been her first litter, her first offspring, and now, she had no one.

Cherry Blossom continued on her way, trying to shake these thoughts away. No, she had to stay strong. She could have more kits, that was always an option. It seemed like a terrible idea though.

She sighed, continuing to walk through the woods. She only hoped she could find her tribe soon. Then she could be comforted, though the guilt would still live within her. Berry, their healer, or what clan cats called a "medicine cat," would be disappointed when she heard the news.

As Cherry Blossom continued, she stopped, hearing a faint cry. She listened, but heard nothing again. She shook her head, continuing along the way. She heard the sound again, a bit louder this time, and she stopped again.

"Hello?" she called.

Nothing stirred or moved. Cherry Blossom was about to continue on her way when she heard the faint cry once more. Curious, Cherry Blossom moved towards a bush where the cry had come from.

"Hello?" she asked again, moving the leaves aside. She gasped as she saw what lay in the bush. Inside the bush was a tiny kitten, newly born. It was a she-cat with a pelt of white and gold.

Cherry Blossom looked around, wondering who had left a newly born kitten out in the woods all alone. She carefully picked up the she-cat, setting her back down on the ground.

"Hello?! Has anyone lost their kit?!" she called a few times, walking up and down the woods. She sniffed the kit, wondering if it

had any clan scent on it. This kit did not smell like any clan though.

Suddenly, Cherry Blossom had an idea, a wonderful idea. She couldn't very well leave the kit in the woods all alone, or it would die. No, this kit was a gift, and perhaps, she could say that she gave birth to this kit, and no cat would have to know her other litter died.

Cherry Blossom agreed on the idea, looking at the helpless kitten. "I suppose I should name you," she whispered. She thought for a moment, then smiled. "I shall name you Salmon, like the ones that leap in the river. Come now, Salmon, we'll be on our way. You will be a ruler one day," she purred, picking up the she-cat by the scruff.

With those words, Cherry Blossom headed off, carrying her new "kit" through the woods.

Chapter 2

Firelight trudged through the forest with anger, tossing a rock by every once in awhile. He was angry, depressed, confused...All he could do was walk through the woods and think.

All the NightClan cats had been tending to each other after the battle, but their medicine could not cure Firelight's broken heart. His beautiful mate, Thrushwing, had been killed in the battle, and only a few moons prior, his sister had been killed. It wasn't fair! Why was StarClan punishing him like this?!

"StarClan!" he spat. "Good for nothing," he murmured, looking back down at his ginger paws. He was beginning to doubt StarClan more and more as each day went on. It was nothing but a bunch of kit tales to him now.

As he walked, he thought of that brave she-cat, Shinypelt, who had vanished MoonClan and the Dark Forest cats. Had it really been StarClan helping her? Firelight wasn't sure. How could they help one cat and destroy another cat's life?

Firelight sighed, continuing to walk. It was then he heard a faint few, and he pricked his ears, confused. What was the odd mew he had heard? Perhaps it had been nothing. A part of him hoped it was Thrushwing though, letting him no she was not dead, but alive.

"No," Firelight spat, shaking his head. He had seen her bloody body. She was dead. She wasn't alive any longer.

The mew came again, louder this time. Where was it coming from? Firelight looked around, then headed towards where he had heard the noise. As he grew closer, he squinted his eyes, spotting a newborn kit squirming on the ground.

Firelight looked around. Whose kit was this? The kit squirmed, mewing again as Firelight grew closer. He bent down, sniffing the kit. It smelled of no clan, and it certainly did not smell

like a kittypet.

"Hello?" Firelight asked, wondering if the parents were nearby. No response came, only the silence of the forest that was mending from its battle. He was about to turn away, but it didn't feel right at all. He couldn't leave this kit in the woods to die...But then again, what if the parents came back.

Firelight sighed. "Curse my good soul," he said, picking up the squirming she-cat by the scruff. Her pelt was white and gold. He shrugged, heading back to camp.

Once he stepped into camp, his mother, Appleclaw, ran to him. "Firelight, where have you been?!" she asked. She stopped, spotting the kit. "Whose kit is this?"

"I-I don't know," Firelight honestly told her. "She has no scent. Hopefully Silverstar will take her in."

Firelight watched as his mother sniffed the kit. Appleclaw nodded. "You're right. There is no scent. Take her to Silverstar."

Firelight nodded, heading towards the leader den. The kit squirmed a little in his grip, though Firelight continued on, heading into the leader's den.

"Silverstar," he said.

The silver she-cat gazed at him, her blue eyes staring into his. She had a nasty wound on her leg from the battle, and she limped forward. "What is it, Firelight?" At the sight of the kit, she froze.

"I found this kit all alone in the woods with no scent on her."

"Are you sure it isn't a SnowClan cat? Maybe it's a kittypet," Silverstar suggested.

"Sniff her for yourself," Firelight said.

He watched as Silverstar bent down, nodding. "You're right.

Why have you brought her here then?"

"Would NightClan be allowed to raise her?" Firelight asked. "She was found on our territory."

"Were there any others around?"

Firelight shook his head. "I looked, but I couldn't find any cats anywhere. I'm not sure who would leave their kit in the woods."

"Very well. It is best you go find a queen to care for the kit," Silverstar spoke.

Firelight nodded, turning away. He was about to pad off when he heard Silverstar speak.

"Oh, and Firelight," she said.

Firelight turned back around. "Yes, Silverstar?"

"What will you call the kit?" she asked.

Firelight thought for a moment, looking at the she-cat. It was hard not to think of Thrushwing as he glanced at her. "Lemonkit," he announced.

Silverstar smiled. "Very well. I'll announce her arrival later. Go take her to the nursery."

Firelight nodded, padding off to the nursery with Lemonkit in his grip. He set her down softly as he padded in, and he smiled as he looked at Daisyfeather with her five kits. He looked to see Frostflight who stared at him with curiosity.

"What have you got there, Firelight?" the gray she-cat asked.

"Her name is Lemonkit, and she was found in the woods all alone. Silverstar's asked me to bring her to the nursery to be nursed," Firelight said.

"Well, if it doesn't bother you, I'm fine nursing the little kitten. I must ask though, will you be raising her as well? You did find her after all," Frostflight said, looking at the kitten.

Firelight looked at the pregnant queen. "No, I can't...She reminds me of Thrushwing too much."

"So you would like to see me as her mother-figure and Hailfrost as her father-figure?" she asked.

Firelight nodded. "Yes. Please don't tell her I've found her either."

"And do we tell her we are her parents?" Frostflight asked.

Firelight shook his head. "I'd like it if she knows the story of how she was found. I would hate lying to her."

"All right. I'll take good care of her, Firelight," Frostlight said, grabbing the little she-cat by the scruff. She set the she-cat down next to her. "Hello, Lemonkit," she whispered.

Firelight gave a smile. "Good-bye, Lemonkit," he whispered. He then left the den, knowing he'd probably never speak to the kitten again.

Chapter 3

Caramel sighed in relief as a bowl of water was pushed towards her. She looked up at her twoleg owner, her bell on her collar ringing at her sudden movement.

"There you go, girl," her twoleg owner said. "You've been through a lot today. Drink up."

Caramel began to lick up the water, thirsty after a long day. She looked at her five kits who suckled from her belly. She had given birth to her third litter today, and she smiled as she looked at her kits. The coolness of leaf-fall brought her comfort, and she sat outside, relaxed.

"We'll name them later," Caramel heard one of her owners say. It was a shame that she couldn't name the kits herself, but she knew the twolegs would choose good names for them.

Caramel looked at her kits, seeing which ones resembled her. Caramel's pelt was a light brown, with the slightest bit of a ginger color. She noticed two brown tabby she-cats who looked the same with Caramel's familiar amber eyes. She looked at the ginger tom with blue eyes who resembled his father. She smiled at the light brown tabby tom with blue eyes, and lastly, the white she-cat with amber eyes. All beautiful kits.

The father of the kits lived a few doors down. He had been Caramel's mate for several seasons now, and he had fathered all of her three litters. She hoped the twolegs would bring him over to visit soon.

As she sat, she closed her eyes, relaxed. She was about to drift off to sleep when she heard the tiniest and slightest mew. She looked at her kits, thinking it had come from them. They were all sound asleep though.

She shrugged, resting her head back down. A few minutes passed,

and the same mew came. Caramel pricked her ears, knowing it had not come from her kits. It sounded like it was on the other side of her fence...near the forest.

The forest, a place that scared Caramel. She had heard legends of violent clan cats that would kill any cat that stepped into the woods. She had never dared to go in there before, but now, she was curious what was making the noise.

Caramel hesitated for a moment, wondering if she should get up. She pricked her ears, hearing the noise again. She then got up, a few of her kits wimpering. She only hoped they didn't mew. They'd take away the other mewing noise.

Caramel slowly jumped up the fence, looking down. She looked around, hearing the mew again. She then spotted it. A small, tiny golden and white she-cat squirming near a bush by her fence. It was obviously newly born. Concerned, Caramel looked around, thinking the mother was nearby. No sound came though, just the mew from the kit.

"Hello? Is anyone here?" Caramel asked. The only response was the wind rustling through the trees. Caramel looked at the kit, knowing she couldn't abandon it. It would die for sure.

Sighing, she jumped down, sniffing the kit. It had no scent on it. It surely wasn't any clan cat. Sighing, she picked up the kit by the scruff, jumping back up her fence and down into her backyard.

She knew she'd have to raise this kit from now on. Hopefully she'd blend in well with the others. Her pelt colors would match.

As she laid back down, her kits mewed with excitement, and Caramel set the small she-cat down with the others. She licked it slowly, then heard the footsteps of her twoleg neighbors. She heard more than usual though, and she smiled as her mate ran through the cat door.

"Caramel!" he exclaimed. "You've had your kits."

Caramel smiled at the ginger tom who went by Whiskers. "Yes,

Whiskers, here they are."

Whiskers smiled, looking at the kits. He pointed to the two brown she-cats. "Oh, they look like you, Caramel. He smiled at the ginger tom. "And he looks like me." He turned to the light brown she-cat. "Another Caramel clone," he laughed. He curiously looked at the white she-cat and the newly found kit. "I guess the white she-cat got my belly color," he said, showing Caramel his white belly. "And wow, a ginger and white she-cat. Beautiful," he said.

Caramel looked to see her twoleg owners looking around in confusion as they looked at Caramel's kits.

"Six? Wasn't it five?" she heard one say.

Caramel gulped, hoping they wouldn't notice.

"We must have miscounted," another one said. "We should name them now and put their collars on."

Caramel smiled as they began the familiar process. They first picked up one of the brown tabby she-cats. They wrapped a red collar around her neck. There was a bit of discussion, and then the twolegs agreed on a name.

"This will be Holly," they said, dropping Holly back down next to Caramel. They picked up the brown tabby she-cat beside her, and in a few moments, had a name picked.

"She resembles Holly so much," one said, wrapping a yellow collar around her. "This will be Polly," they said, dropping Polly down next to Holly.

She saw Whiskers twitch with amusement, and then she watched as he licked Holly and Polly's foreheads. They squirmed as their father licked them.

The ginger tom mewed as the twolegs picked him up. He was the only tom in the litter, and Caramel was sure he would get the most attention from his father.

They wrapped a black collar around his neck, then spoke a few

moments about what they would call the tom. "Tiger," they said at last, dropping Tiger down next to his mother.

"Tiger, my only son," Whiskers said, licking the tom.

Caramel watched as the twolegs now picked up the light brown tabby she-cat with Whisker's blue eyes. They wrapped a blue collar around her, quickly coming up with the name of Hazelnut.

Hazelnut was laid back down with her other siblings while the white she-cat and the she-cat Caramel had found were picked up. She watched as one twoleg wrapped a green collar around the white she-cat while the others wrapped an orange collar around the found kitten.

"The white she-cat will be Snowflake, and the golden and white will be Sunrise," they declared, setting the two down.

Caramel smiled. They had bought it. Sunrise was now officially her kit. Her thoughts were interrupted as she felt Whiskers walk by her.

"They are beautiful kits, Caramel. It'll be a shame to watch them go," he said.

"Maybe they'll let me keep one this time," Caramel sighed. "I'm sure we'd all enjoy that."

Whiskers nodded. "Yes, very much." He looked up, spotting his twoleg owners calling him. He turned back to Caramel. "It seems I have to go. I'll see you later!"

"Good-bye," Caramel said, waving her tail. She the looked at her six kits, smiling. This had to be the most beautiful litter of all, and Sunrise seemed to make it even better. She watched as Sunrise opened her eyes, and Caramel gasped. At first, they were a bright glowing blue. They seemed to dim down, and she smiled as she looked at Sunrise's dark blue eyes. She really could pass as Whisker's daughter.

Chapter 4

Patchfur wasn't sure what his emotions were as he padded through the woods. He held Lifekit firmly by the scruff, and she slept soundly. He wasn't sure what to feel. His mate had just died, but then she had been replaced by Lifekit. Patchfur still didn't know if Lifekit was his kit or a reincarnation of Shinypelt.

"Are you all right?" Cloudstar asked, placing his tail on his shoulder.

"Fine," Patchfur sighed. "I just don't know about Lifekit though," he sighed.

"Raise her as if she were your kit, Patchfur. She technically is your kit, and you're her father. Be happy. You now have a wonderful daughter to raise," Cloudstar told him.

"I can't help but think of Shinypelt every time I look at her though," he sighed.

"I'm sure she'll remind you of Shinypelt, Patchfur, but you should look at her like she is a gift from StarClan. Shinypelt risked her life to save the clan, and you got a beautiful kit in return."

"Thanks," Patchfur said.

"Anytime," Cloudstar said, walking past him.

Patchfur looked up, seeing Graytail and Stormnight walking with each other. Patchfur wondered how they were dealing after Shinypelt's death. He would be sure to visit them later.

As the cats walked into the camp, the elders and nursery queens cheered, thrilled the battle had been won. Patchfur didn't feel very cheerful though. He had lost someone so close to him...He looked at Lifekit though and smiled, watching as Cloudstar padded

up the rock to make an announcement.

"CATS OF SNOWCLAN! I am pleased to announce at long last we have destroyed MoonClan and Moonstar once and for all!" he yowled. "However, Shinypelt sacrificed her life to save the clans, and we owe all our debt to her. Please, join in a moment of silence to thank the young she-cat."

Cats looked down at their paws, and the whole clan fell completely silent. Lifekit let out a little mew, and Patchfur shushed her lightly.

Cloudstar went on, explaining Lifekit and the warriors that died in battle. As he did so, Patchfur went on to take Lifekit to the nursery where she would be nursed.

Splashleap sat in the nursery, her belly quite large. Patchfur assumed she would give birth in a matter of days.

"Patchfur, I've see you've brought the kit," she purred.

Patchfur nodded. "I had hoped you'd be willing to nurse her," he said. "Your kits are due anytime now, correct?"

Splashleap nodded. "I'd be thrilled to nurse her. Her name is Lifekit, correct?"

Patchfur nodded. "Yes, her name is Lifekit."

"Now, I am not her adoptive mother, correct?" she asked.

"You might be her mother-figure, but I don't know about adoptive mother. I'm her father. She'll know that. I don't want her learning about everything her mother has been through. In fact, Lifekit may be Shinypelt. It's too confusing to explain. Please, if she asks, tell her that her mother died valiantly in battle. Pass it around to the others."

"Of course," Splashleap said. "I'll let Cloudstar know so he may inform the clan."

Patchfur smiled. "Thank you. Do you mind if I stay in here

with her for a little while. I assume her family members will be coming in."

"Not at all. There aren't many in here at the moment," Splashleap said, glancing at the four other she-cats in the nursery. The only two that had given birth were Softheart and Tasha, and Softheart's kits were nearly the oldest in the nursery.

Patchfur sat down, Lifekit pushed up against him. It felt odd that he had to care for such a small kitten now. He and Shinypelt had talked about having kits, but now...He shook the thought away, then looked up, seeing Mousestripe and Thornfrost walk into the den.

"Patchfur," Mousestripe said, a weak smile on her face. Patchfur didn't expect her to smile though. After all, she had just lost her daughter.

"Hi, Mousestripe. Hi, Thornfrost," Patchfur said to the deputy of the clan. He was Mousestripe's mate and Shinypelt's adoptive father after her real father had been killed.

"Can I see the kit?" Mousestripe asked.

Patchfur nodded, moving out the way to reveal Lifekit. He watched as tears gathered in Mousestripe's eyes. "Oh, she looks just like when Shinypelt was born." Patchfur watched as Thornfrost put a tail on her shoulder to comfort her.

"Is she your kit?" Thornfrost asked.

"I'm not sure. No one is," Patchfur told him. "She may be a reincarnation of Shinypelt...maybe. It's too confusing. Please, just tell her that her mother died in the battle. I don't want to confuse her."

"Well, I'm sure you'll be a good father, and I'll help you any way I can," Mousestripe told him.

"Thanks," Patchfur said. As she walked out, he watched as Graytail and Stormnight rushed in.

Stormnight gave a quick hello to his pregnant mate, then turned to Lifekit. "Is she Shinypelt?" he asked.

"I don't know," Patchfur said to Shinypelt's two brothers. "I'm just telling her that her mother died in battle. Please tell her the same."

Graytail nodded. "Will do. If you need any help, just let us know."

"I will," Patchfur said. He watched as the two walked out, and then he sighed. He turned to Lifekit, weakly smiling. "I've got to go now, Lifekit. I love you," he whispered. He pushed her near Splashleap then headed out of the den, sighing.

"Oh, Shinypelt, where are you?" he asked.

Chapter 5

Salmon watched her mother's tail flick back and forth inside the birthing den. As it came down once more, she leapt, clawing at the tail.

Her mother laughed a charming laugh, moving her tail away.

"I'd say she's already a natural born hunter," Berry, the healer, spoke.

Salmon looked at her mother and the cream she-cat, noticing how tall they were.

When I'm leader, she thought, *I'll be the best tribe cat there ever was!*

Salmon smiled as her father, Oak, padded into the den. "Good morning, dear," he said to Cherry Blossom. He then turned to Salmon.

"And good morning to my beautiful daughter!" he exclaimed.

"Good morning, Daddy!" Salmon giggled, running to the large brown tabby tom.

"She's as energetic as you once were," Oak told Cherry Blossom.

Salmon watched Cherry Blossom weakly smile. Did she not think Salmon was like her?

"She's a blessing," Cherry Blossom said. "And she'll be the next leader," she purred.

"If you don't give birth to any toms she will," Oak said.

Salmon froze. No, she didn't want any siblings, especially brothers. If she had a brother, he'd be the leader, not her.

"No, Daddy! I want to be leader!" Salmon begged.

"Salmon, don't you worry," Cherry Blossom told her. "Prove you're a strong fighter and hunter, and Oak will be bound to let you lead," she whispered.

"It's no fair a she-cat gets to lead," Storm, an older kit, complained. His mother, a gray tabby she-cat, swiped a tail over his mouth.

"Storm, you don't speak like that!" she spat. "Be more courteous like your sisters," she told him.

"When will there be more toms in the birth den?" Storm complained.

Salmon rolled her eyes. The tom was annoying as ever. She would be glad when he left the den.

"Salmon, it's time for your check-up," Cherry Blossom called.

Salmon raced towards her mother, and she stood up straight as Berry inspected her.

"She's perfect and healthy, Cherry Blossom, just a bit small, that's all. She'll grow though," Berry told her.

"Thank goodness," Cherry Blossom said, letting out a cough.

Salmon had noticed her mother coughing a bit more than usual. At times, she'd go into coughing fits.

"Cherry Blossom, I really think you should let me check out that throat of yours," Berry told her.

"It's fine," she said, still coughing. "It's probably just a sickness after giving birth."

"Salmon is two weeks old, Cherry Blossom. It would have already passed. I insist, please come to my den," Berry begged her.

"No, I'm fine!" she spat. "Leave me be!"

"I don't want you passing a disease onto your daughter," Berry said.

"Later. I am busy right now," Cherry Blossom said.

Salmon looked at her mother with concern. Wasn't she supposed to follow Berry's orders? Berry was the healer, after all.

Salmon raced to her father, crouching down ready to play. Her father, however, did not move.

"I'm sorry, Salmon, but I've got to tend to the other cats right now. We'll play later, okay?"

"Okay, Daddy," Salmon sighed, watching as her father padded away. She turned to her mother, padding over to her.

"Don't you pay any attention to your father. He's stubborn, and he thinks the tribe always needs him."

"Will you play with me, Mommy?" Salmon asked, resting her paws on her mother's flank.

"Not now, darling. I'm tired. Later, I promise," she said, gently licking Salmon's cheek.

Salmon gagged as the tongue rasped across her face, and she raced off to Rain's litter.

Storm sat near the corner of the den while Honey and Mouse played together.

"Hi," Salmon squeaked.

She watched as Mouse's face lifted into a smile. "Hi, Salmon. Want to play?" Mouse asked.

Salmon nodded. "I've been wanting to play all day!" she exclaimed, relieved to finally find a playmate.

Together, Mouse, Honey, and Salmon wrestled, and Salmon was glad to have some friends in the nursery.

"Mouse and Honey, you're almost ready to go on your first hunt and you're still playing kit games," Storm spoke.

"Oh, be quiet," Honey snapped. "Who gave you rotten prey?"

"You're no fun, Storm," Salmon told him.

"Whatever," he said, heading back over to his mother.

Moments later, Rain took her litter outside, leaving Salmon alone in the den.

"Mommy, Mommy," Salmon said, pushing her mother.

She watched as Cherry Blossom opened one eye. "What is it, darling?"

"Can we play now?" Salmon asked.

Cherry Blossom sighed, then yawned. "I suppose," she said, standing up. She moved around a little.

"Are you okay?" Salmon asked.

"Just a bit tired, that's all. Now what do you want to play?" she asked.

Before Salmon could answer, she knew something was wrong with her mother. She was terribly unbalanced, and she looked tired as ever. Salmon was about to tell her they didn't have to play when Cherry Blossom suddenly collapsed on the floor.

"MOMMY! MOMMY!" she gasped, shaking her mother. Cherry Blossom didn't move though.

"BERRY! HELP!" Salmon gasped.

Berry rushed into the den, followed by Oak. He rushed past Salmon, running to his mate's side.

"Into the den now!" Berry instructed. "I'm afraid she's come down with the winter plague."

They took Cherry Blossom out of the den. Salmon followed behind, only to be instructed to stay in the den by her father.

"Mommy," Salmon whimpered, praying her mother would be okay.

Chapter 6

Lemonkit slowly opened her eyes to see Frostflight leaning over her. She jumped at the sight of the she-cat, and she watched as Frostflight gave a little laugh.

"Good morning, Lemonkit," she said.

Lemonkit smiled. "Good morning," she said, rising to her feet. She slowly stretched, letting out a loud yawn. She turned, looking at Frostflight. The she-cat was smaller than most of the other warriors, and she was very pregnant. Ambershine, the medicine cat, claimed her kits would be coming any day.

"Is everything okay?" Frostflight asked.

"Fine," Lemonkit said. "When are your kits going to be born?" she asked.

Frostflight smiled. "I don't know, Lemonkit, but I want you to know that even when the kits are born, Hailfrost and I will still care for you and love you very much," she purred.

Lemonkit smiled. "Thanks. Frostflight, do you know what happened to my parents?" Lemonkit had been raised knowing that she was orphan. No cat had told her anything about it though, and she was curious to know why.

She watched as Frostflight frowned. "I don't really know too much about your parents. But I'm sure they loved you very much."

Lemonkit frowned. It felt as if everyone was hiding a secret from her.

"Why don't you go play with Daisyfeather's kits?" she suggested.

Lemonkit sighed. "Fine," she said, padding over to the five kits. She had to admit, she was great friends with all of

Daisyfeather's kits. They were like her siblings, and they were very close to her.

There were five-Raspberrykit, Thymekit, Mangokit, Koikit, and Windkit. Raspberrykit was a dark ginger she-cat who was the largest out of the litter, and certainly the loudest. Thymekit was the runt of the litter. He was a shy gray tom with a twisted ear, and he was certainly Lemonkit's favorite playmate.

Mangokit was a bright ginger she-cat who was also a great playmate. Koikit was equally as loud as Raspberrykit, and with her tortoiseshell pelt, she could certainly be spotted out of the litter. The last was Windkit, the other tom. He was a pure white, and a lot of fun.

"Hey, Lemonkit!" Mangokit said, waving her tail as Lemonkit padded over.

Lemonkit smiled. "What's up?"

"We're just about ready to play a game!" Raspberrykit announced, bouncing up and down with excitement.

"Hopefully it's a fun game this time," Thymekit murmured.

"Oh, it will be!" Lemonkit giggled, shoving him. He smiled back at her, a smile she loved.

"Hey, Mangokit! What are you doing?" a voice came.

Lemonkit turned, seeing Arcticpaw, one of the apprentices, walking into the den. He had pure white fur and blue eyes, resembling his mother, Winterfrost.

"Playing catch the leaf!" Mangokit told him, swiping one of the leaves in the air. Autumn leaves still continued to fall, and Lemonkit knew leaf-bare was well on its way.

"Wanna play?" Arcticpaw asked.

The tom had been stopping by every once in awhile now to play with the kits. Lemonkit loved how he found the time to still be

a kit while his siblings stayed in the apprentice den during their freetime.

"Of course!" Mangokit exclaimed.

Before any cat could speak, Raspberrykit leapt onto Arcticpaw's head. "I'm the king of the castle!" she shouted, laughing.

Lemonkit laughed with Thymekit, watching as Arcticpaw trotted around, even pretending to make a "neigh" here and there.

Lemonkit turned, seeing Mangokit frowning. "I want a turn!" she complained.

Koikit sat to Lemonkit as they watched Mangokit cling onto Arcticpaw's back as he ran around the nursery. Lemonkit laughed with Thymekit and Koikit, watching as he continued to race around. Lemonkit felt bad for Frostflight who just wanted to get some sleep.

Raspberrykit still hung on Arcticpaw's head, and she leaned over, looking at Arcticpaw. She suddenly dropped to the ground, easily recovering. "Guys! I have a game!" she announced.

Lemonkit smiled. Raspberrykit *always* had a game.

"It's called 'Don't Fall'," she said. "We line up some sticks and try to walk across without falling!"

"Sounds fun!" Lemonkit purred.

Together, all the kits grabbed sticks and lined them up in the nursery, excited to play the new game that Raspberrykit had made up. Once the sticks began to line up, cats began walking across, laughing as they went across.

Lemonkit began to walk over the sticks, tripping in mere seconds. She fell over, laughing. Turning, she spotted Thymekit sitting next to his sleeping mother with a frown on his face.

"What's the matter?" Lemonkit asked, padding over to him.

"Nothing," he grumbled.

"He's too chicken to try!" Raspberrykit spat.

"I am not a chicken!" Thymekit spat back at her.

"Then prove it!" Raspberrykit yowled. "Go into the forest until you can't see the camp anymore! I have to watch you to make sure you don't chicken out."

"FINE!" Thymekit spoke.

Lemonkit didn't like Raspberrykit's idea. Frostflight had told her that it was dangerous in the woods, especially for a bunch of kits.

"I-I don't know about this," Lemonkit said, looking over at the sleeping Daisyfeather. Frostflight was asleep too, and she watched as Arcticpaw bit his lip in uncertainty.

Before anyone could say anything, Thymekit burst out of the den, and Lemonkit immediately burst after him. She watched as he ran into the woods, and she gulped, running in. She had never been in the woods before, but something was familiar about the woods. Something felt good about the wind blowing her fur and the leaves falling from the trees. It felt nice.

She watched as Thymekit stopped near a hill. "Thymekit!" Lemonkit called, not wanting her friend to continue.

"Lemonkit?" he asked, turning his head. Suddenly, he slipped on a stick, and she watched in fear as he tumbled down the hill into a river.

"THYMEKIT!" she gasped, running down the hill. She watched as the tom floated at the top of the river unconscious. She looked, seeing a blood spot on a nearby rock. He must've hit his head on there!

Lemonkit had to grab the tom, but she had no idea how to swim. How would she ever manage to save her friend and herself?

She heard a gasp, and she turned, seeing Raspberrykit with fear in her eyes. Lemonkit edged into the water, grabbing Thymekit.

She lugged him onto the shore, horrified as she saw the cut on the top of his head. Blood was all over the top of his head, and she felt Raspberrykit rush towards her.

"This is all my fault," Raspberrykit whimpered.

"Lemonkit? Is that you?"

Lemonkit turned, gasping as she saw the familiar face of Hailfrost. She knew at that moment she was in a lot of trouble, especially for being out in the woods all alone.

The tom gasped as he saw Raspberrykit and the injured Thymekit. "Come on, kits. We need to head back," he said, grabbing Thymekit. Lemonkit rushed back with Hailfrost and Raspberrykit, knowing she would be getting a lecture from her "father" afterwards.

She rushed into the medicine cat with the three cats, and she saw the look of concern on Ambershine's face as they set Thymekit down on the moss. The tom was still unconscious, and Lemonkit worried he wouldn't make it.

"He's hit his head," Ambershine said, beginning to clean off his wound. Lemonkit watched as the calico she-cat rushed back and forth, trying to help the tom.

Suddenly, Lemonkit sighed in relief. She had seen Thymekit's eye twitch, and though it was not much and hard to notice, it was enough to let her know he was alive. Soon, his eyes opened, and he looked around at Ambershine. His gaze then turned directly at Lemonkit, and he opened his mouth to speak, but nothing came out.

There was a sudden gasp from Ambershine. Daisyfeather who had shortly arrived gasped too.

"I'm afraid there's been some brain damage and he's..."

"He's gone mute!" Daisyfeather exclaimed.

Lemonkit felt as if her heart had just split into a million

pieces. No, this couldn't happen to her best friend. They were going to train together as apprentices, they were going to hunt together...

"Will he ever speak again?" Lemonkit whimpered.

She watched as she saw the sorrow in Thymekit's eyes. He could obviously hear well and see well, he just couldn't speak.

"It depends," Ambershine told her. "He may or may not. I can't tell how damaged his head is. We need to get him immediate help though."

"Bluefur knows sign language," Hailfrost suggested.

"Perfect. Lemonkit, you and Thymekit's siblings will have to come to his sign language meetings. Since it is unknown if he will speak again, it is good to know sign language in order to communicate with him."

Lemonkit nodded, tears streaming down her face. "I'm sorry, Thymekit," she said.

He shook his head, as if saying it was not her fault. She watched as Hailfrost sighed.

"Come on, Lemonkit," he said.

Lemonkit looked at Thymekit one last time in sadness as she exited the den. She turned, looking at Hailfrost.

"Why were you in the forest?" he demanded.

"It wasn't my fault!" Lemonkit argued. "Raspberrykit sent him in there to prove he wasn't a wimp. I went after him because I knew it was wrong, and he fell into the river."

"You should've sent a warrior there. Where was Daisyfeather?"

"Asleep," Lemonkit said, looking down at her paws.

"Frostflight?"

"Asleep as well," Lemonkit whimpered.

"Please, be careful, Lemonkit. I don't want to see you in the woods again. Do you understand?" he asked.

"Yes, Daddy," she said. It felt odd calling Hailfrost her father and Frostflight her mother, but technically, they were her parents for the time being.

"Back into the nursery," he told her.

Lemonkit nodded, slowly padding back into the nursery. She sat down near the corner of the den away from her mother, and she silently cried. She knew Mangokit, Koikit, Windkit, and the others were watching, but she didn't care. It hurt so much to see her best friend lose his voice and personality in a few moments, and it hurt even more to know that he might never speak again.

Chapter 7

"Come on, kits! Get up!" Caramel's yowl rang through the entire house. Sunrise slowly got to her feet, stretching slowly.

"Good morning, darling," Caramel said, licking Sunrise's head.

"Why do we have to get up so early?" Sunrise complained.

"Because it's a very special day," Caramel said.

Sunrise shrugged, sitting down next to her mother. Tiger got up moments later, carefully stepping over his sisters. Holly and Polly quickly got up, running to their mother's side. Hazelnut slowly stretched, sitting near her mother.

"Snowflake, it's time to get up," she told the she-cat.

Snowflake opened her blue eyes and yawned, slowly getting up. She was the smallest, and Sunrise's favorite sister. Unlike Holly, Polly, and Hazelnut, she was kind and sweet. Her other sisters were just annoying. Tiger spent all his time with his father, leaving her and Snowflake to bond.

"What is it, Mommy?" Polly asked.

"Yeah," Holly chimed in.

"You remember how I told you that soon you'd be leaving the house to go with your new families," Caramel spoke.

Sunrise shrunk down. She didn't want to leave. She wanted to stay with her mother here in the house.

"But, Mommy, I like it here!" Hazelnut complained.

"I know, darling, but imagine the joy when your new owners take care of you. They'll be arriving today, so some of you

will be on your way to a brand new home," Caramel told them.

"Do we have to go?" Sunrise asked.

"I'm sorry, Sunrise, but I have no choice. I'd love to keep all you beautiful kittens, but it is the humans' choices, not mine," Caramel sighed.

"What about those forest cats? Can't we live out there with them?" Tiger asked.

"Who told you about the forest?!" Caramel demanded.

Sunrise had seen the tall trees from the backyard, but she had been in the woods before. She didn't know there were any cats living in there. Why would they? Wouldn't they rather like to sleep inside and be fed well?

"Daddy told me once," Tiger whimpered.

"I'll have to have a talk with your father," Caramel said. "We will not be going into the woods. No such thing will ever be discussed again. Understood?"

Slowly, all the kits nodded.

"Good," Caramel said. Sunrise pricked her ears as she heard the familiar sound of the doorbell. "Here they are," Caramel said.

Sunrise shrunk down near the bed, watching as humans began to make their way into the room to see the kits. She quickly ran to Snowflake's side.

"I've never seen so many humans," Snowflake admitted.

"Me either," Sunrise said, watching as they made their way towards the kits. Hazelnut and Tiger played around with a ball while Holly and Polly wrestled with each other.

"Kits, go play!" Caramel instructed, pushing them forward. Her force was strong, and she ended up pushing Sunrise right into a child.

Sunrise quickly stood up, only to feel the child grab her. She yowled, trying to get free from the child's grip. The child laughed though and pet the kit, and she groaned, knowing she couldn't claw at the kid.

"This one, Mommy! This one!" the child yelled.

"That one seems rather shy, don't you think?" the human spoke, taking Sunrise out of the child's hands. She laid her back down, and Sunrise immediately rushed back to Snowflake.

"Sunrise, what are you doing?" Caramel demanded.

"I don't want to be around all these people," she whimpered. "They're scary."

"You'll never get a new home if you act like this," Caramel told her. "Play with a ball. Be cute."

Sunrise groaned, beginning to claw at a feather a different child was playing with. The child laughed, and Sunrise smiled a little, glad someone appreciated her.

Sunrise looked up, watching two humans talking with her owners. Were they going to adopt one of her siblings? She was unsure.

She continued playing with the feather, and she laughed, striking it quickly. She felt a rush in her veins, and she leapt in the air, catching it between her teeth. It was ripped out of the child's grip, and she smiled, dropping it. She had never felt so free before.

"Sunrise, where did you learn those moves?" Snowflake asked her.

Sunrise shrugged. "In my blood, I guess."

"We're house cats," Snowflake told her. "I can't leap like that."

"You're not trying hard enough," Sunrise told her.

Snowflake opened her mouth to speak when suddenly she backed up. Sunrise felt two hands grabbed her, and she called out, squirming.

She looked, seeing Holly and Polly in the arms of the child who had swayed the feather.

"Three cats? That's quite a lot," she heard her owner say.

"It's hard to choose between all three. We have three children, and I know they all want a cat," she heard the human say. "What are their names?"

"Those two are Holly and Polly. The one you are holding is Sunrise."

"No! I don't want to go with them! I don't want to live with Holly and Polly! Mommy!" Sunrise wailed.

"I'm sorry, Sunrise. There's nothing I can do. You're going to a great home," she told her.

"Snowflake," Sunrise whimpered.

"I'm sorry," Snowflake said, looking up at her.

Without warning, Sunrise was tossed into a bag with Holly and Polly.

"Ouch! My tail!" Polly complained.

"Well there doesn't seem to be enough room in here," Sunrise spat.

"So you're coming with us," Holly said. "Didn't think they'd want you."

"Oh, hush up," Sunrise said, sitting down. Through the tiny holes, she watched as she saw her mother, her siblings, her life, vanish from her, and she was led into a car.

"Mom, can I hold the cat?" she heard the child say. He was

older than the young girl who had picked her up before, and he seemed to know how to handle a cat better.

Sunrise expected him to grab Holly or Polly, but instead, he grabbed Sunrise. She sat on his lap, looking up at her new owner. He had brown hair and green eyes, and she smiled as he pet the she-cat.

"What? Why aren't we being pet?" Polly complained.

Sunrise laughed a little. Maybe she would get the better end of the bargain.

The drive was short, and soon enough, Sunrise was introduced to a large house. There was a large lawn, perfect for playing, and a lovely tree she could climb. She expected the boy to let her play, but he took her straight inside.

She sniffed the air. Everything smelled different than back home. He slowly set her down, and she immediately raced to the sliding door. She was caught in surprise when she spotted no cat door. How would she go outside into the backyard? She was able to do that back home.

"Mom, are the cats here?!" she heard a girl scream.

Sunrise turned, watching as two girls who were older than the boy raced out. One spotted Sunrise and began to run to her. Sunrise squealed, hiding behind the chair.

"Girls, your cats are here," she heard her new owner say. She watched as the girls squealed as they grabbed their new kittens.

"Pampered as always," Sunrise laughed. She heard the chair moved, and she mewed, watching as the boy picked her up. He was gentle, and she squirmed a little, though he knew how to properly hold a kit. She watched as he walked into a room. Inside was a tiny cat bed and some food and water. He slowly set her down, and she moved towards the cat bed, sitting inside. It was nice and cozy. Maybe she could get used to this place.

There was a tiny litterbox too and some cat toys. It was a

tiny room, more like a closet, though she didn't mind. She watched, seeing the boy leave. Curious, she followed him until she came into a large room. She had never seen such a room before. There was a comfy bed and a window.

"Sunrise, you weren't supposed to follow me in here," the boy said, grabbing the cat. He set her down on the bed, and she mewed.

"That's a good girl," he said, stroking the she-cat.

Sunrise purred, laying down on the bed. The sun shined perfectly on her fur, and she smiled, warm. She closed her eyes, thinking about her mother and siblings. Would they all miss her? She knew Snowflake would.

Maybe this place isn't so bad at all, she thought, drifting off to sleep.

Chapter 8

Lifekit opened her eyes slowly, looking around the quiet nursery den. From her tiny nest in the corner, she could see Splashleap sleeping peacefully with her two new daughters. She could see Tasha, the former rogue, licking her kits softly. She looked to see Blueocean, the newest addition to the nursery, sleeping away.

Though Splashleap nursed her, Lifekit did not think of Splashleap as her mother. Her family was nowhere in the nursery. There was her father, Patchfur. She saw Mousestripe as her mother-figure. Thornfrost, Stormnight, and Graytail didn't mind hanging out with her too. All in all, she had a wonderful little family of her own.

"Pst, Lifekit," a whisper came.

Lifekit turned, seeing Mousestripe stick her head inside the den. She immediately rose to her feet, bounding out the door to greet the older she-cat.

"Hi, Mousestripe!" Lifekit squeaked.

"Hello," Mousestripe smiled, lightly touching her tail on top of Lifekit's shoulder. The sun was just beginning to rise, and many cats were already preparing for patrols.

"Where's Daddy?" Lifekit asked.

"He'll be along. He's got some patrols to do, as does Thornfrost. Come along, let's walk," Mousestripe said. Lifekit padded by her side, smiling at the she-cat. Mousestripe looked at her intently though, and Lifekit wondered why. She caught many cats doing this from time to time.

"Will Thornfrost be leader soon?" Lifekit asked.

Mousestripe's mate, Thornfrost, was the deputy of SnowClan, so there was no doubt he'd be the new leader.

"Cloudstar is an old cat," Mousestripe told Lifekit. "He was a kit when the first leader of SnowClan, Icestar, ruled. He's outlived many cats in this clan. If it weren't for his nine lives, he'd probably have passed by now."

"How old are you, Mousestripe?" Lifekit asked.

Mousestripe giggled. "Never ask how old a cat is, Lifekit. I am an older she-cat, but not as old as the elders. I still have strong bones and keen skills. I could be a warrior for moons to come."

"Daddy says your father was leader," Lifekit told her.

Mousestripe nodded. "Yes, he was leader."

"Was he a good leader?"

"Well, I wouldn't say that," Mousestripe murmured, sitting down. Lifekit sat down beside the she-cat.

"How come?"

"Smokestar made a lot of mistakes in his life," Mousestripe told her.

"What kind of mistakes?" Lifekit pondered.

"Mistakes I will tell you when you're older," Mousestripe laughed. She paused for a moment, then spoke. "You look so much like your mother."

Lifekit had heard this many times, though she didn't know why cats spoke to her about it so much. She was her mother's daughter. Wasn't she supposed to look like her mother?

"What was Shinypelt like?" Lifekit asked.

"She was a very brave and wise cat, Lifekit," Mousestripe told her. "Just like you," she said, poking the she-cat with her tail.

Lifekit giggled as she felt Mousestripe's tail lightly touch her.

"Daddy says she died in battle," Lifekit mumbled.

Mousestripe froze. "She did, Lifekit, but she died bravely defending the clan. It's because of her and all these warriors that SnowClan has remained safe and recovered from the battle. With leaf-bare only a short time away, we need to gather up much prey."

"It seems like everyone misses her a lot," Lifekit said, the subject focused on her mother again. She was so curious about her mother, and her questions never seemed to be answered.

"We all miss cats," Mousestripe told her.

"Thornfrost is not Shinypelt's father, right?" Lifekit asked, vaguely remembering her father mentioning that at one time.

"No," Mousestripe told her. "My first mate, Reedtail, was. He died...defending the territory, along with my father. Nasty MoonClan cats, they are. Thornfrost is the father of Tawnyheart's kits."

"Tawnyheart? I've heard warriors talk to her from time to time," Lifekit mentioned.

"Well, uh, yes. She was quite popular, I suppose. She died awhile ago, and now I'm happy with Thornfrost. I'm sure you'll find a special cat too one day," Mousestripe told her. "Your father is here," she said, pointing to the distance.

Lifekit immediately recognized her father. He stood there with his white and gray pelt, chatting to some other warriors she had seen him talking to before. Leaving Mousestripe, she raced to her father, giggling as she felt the autumn breeze twirl around her.

She ran into her father's side, and as he laughed, she could feel his whole body vibrate. "Hey," he said.

"Hi, Daddy! What are you doing?" she asked.

"Just chatting. Come on, let's sit," he said, sitting down near

the center of the camp. Lifekit sat down beside him, glad to be with her father.

"I hear Mousestripe took you out of the nursery this morning?"

"Oh, yes, Daddy, she did!"

"Why don't you play with the other kits, Lifekit?" her father asked. "I'm not sure your daily walks with Mousestripe are good for you."

"What do you mean?" Lifekit asked.

"You're only a kit. You should play around, like a normal kit would," her father told her. If there was one thing she hated about her father, it would be that he liked to lecture her about being a normal cat.

"I am a normal cat!" Lifekit argued, seeing uncertainty flicker in Patchfur's eyes. "And there are no kits to play with!"

"Splashleap just had two kits, Lifekit. Why not play with them?" he suggested.

"They're new kits, Daddy. Splashleap won't let me touch them," she argued.

"What about Tasha's kits?"

Lifekit froze. She had heard everything going around about how the former rogue had become mates with a MoonClan cat and had given birth to his kits. Before she could stop herself, she blurted out, "They're MoonClan cats!"

Patchfur froze. "How did you hear of that?"

"I hear everyone talking about it," Lifekit explained.

Patchfur sighed. "It isn't fair to judge a cat by their heritage. Tasha didn't know the rogue was a MoonClan cat at the time. So yes, they are MoonClan cats, but they are not vicious or brutal like

everyone makes them to be. I'm going to tell you a story."

Lifekit sighed. Another lesson-in-a-story.

"When I was a kit, we'd go to the elders den and hear lots of stories. This is one of my favorites. When MoonClan first attacked, before I was ever born, before Mousestripe was ever born, there was a kittypet tom who joined the clan. His name was Blaze, you see. Icestar, the first leader, renamed him Foxpaw. Now, later on, two MoonClan she-cats showed up on SnowClan territory. Their names were Petalpaw and Tinypaw.

"No one wanted to trust the cats. Icestar was getting old, and she was beginning to lose it. It took some convincing, but Icestar let them join. The cats were rejected from the time to time, but Foxpaw, the young tom, didn't seem to notice or care.

"When Petalpaw was a warrior, she was named Petalstream. She got into a fight with Icestar, and Icestar, who had completely lost it by then, exiled Petalstream for simply arguing and being a MoonClan cat. They fled to FoxClan, but Foxpaw ran after her. Eventually, he was able to bring the two sisters back and convinced Icestar to let them stay, all because he saw them as equal."

"Boring," Lifekit muttered.

"Go play with Tasha's kits, then," Patchfur instructed. "Even if they are MoonClan cats, they are surely as sweet and kind as Tasha."

Lifekit nodded, still ignoring her father's words. How could someone trust a MoonClan cat? As she made her way to the nursery, she froze, watching as Splashleap emerged in a fit.

"WATERFALLKIT IS GONE!" she shrieked.

Cats began to panic, racing around the camp. Lifekit fled back to her father, watching as Cloudstar yowled from the top of the rock.

"Calm down! We will send out a patrol immediately!" he yowled.

"You go to Graytail and Stormnight," Patchfur instructed, shoving her towards the warriors den. Lifekit slowly entered, nearly running into the two silver-blue toms.

"Sorry, Lifekit. We can't play. Cloudstar's going to send us out on patrol," Stormnight told her.

She watched as Patchfur marched up to the two. "I need you *here* to watch Lifekit."

"But isn' the nursery going to let her stay?" Graytail asked.

"The nursery is an investigation zone right now. Just watch her," Patchfur instructed, hissing at the two brothers. He ran off, leaving Lifekit alone with the two. She didn't really understand why Patchfur even trusted them. He seemed to yell at them constantly. Lifekit wasn't even really sure why. She just knew that Stormnight and Graytail were her mother's brothers, technically making them family.

"Well, this is boring," Stormnight groaned, leaning against the den. Lifekit sat beside him, watching as cats quickly scurried.

As the day passed on, Lifekit paced around the empty camp, Stormnight and Graytail chatting near the warriors den. She wondered when anyone would come back, when her father, when Mousestripe, when Thornfrost would return.

As the sun's rays began to set, Lifekit was about to give up and go to sleep in Graytail's nest, when she saw cats coming up from the horizon.

"They're back! They're back!" she shouted.

Immediately, cats raced out of dens, watching as cats slowly came back.

"My baby!" Splashleap cried, racing towards the cats.

Lifekit could see the small Waterfallkit walking, but as she looked up, all the cats seemed to have a sad, mournful expression on her face.

She felt Stormnight tense beside her. "Oh no," he murmured. "Come on, Lifekit. Let's go into the warriors den," he said, bringing her inside.

Confused, Lifekit sat in the den with Graytail. "What's going on?" she asked.

"I'm not sure," Graytail told her.

"But you must know!"

"Cats of SnowClan!" Thornfrost's yowl rang across the rock this time, not Cloudstar's.

"Why can't I see?" Lifekit asked, edging forward.

"Stay in here!" Graytail hissed.

"Though I am pleased to announce that Waterfallkit is back, we have lost a great cat today. Cloudstar."

Cats mewed in confusion, and Lifekit tilted her head, confused. She hadn't thought Cloudstar was on his last life.

As Thornfrost continued, she was shocked to learn that his lives had been repeatedly taken. Apparently, some tribe cats had planned to sacrifice Waterfallkit, and Cloudstar had valiantly taken her place. She gagged as she heard of how he had been set on fire and had died. As the message ended, she watched as Thornfrost went off with Sandheart to receive his nine lives.

"Come on. Let's take you back to the nursery," Graytail said, slowly walking her back. She turned, watching as grave was being dug, but Graytail shook his head.

"No, don't look," he said, shoving her into the nursery. "Sleep tight, all right?"

Lifekit nodded slowly, padding to her nest. She hoped her father had been all right out in the woods. Was Cloudstar the only one dead? Who would Thornfrost appoint as deputy? All these questions ran through her head until she eventually fell asleep.

Chapter 9

Salmon sat near the den, the autumn wind flying through her pelt. She stood, watching the leaves fall. A storm rumbled up ahead, not that she cared though. She didn't care anymore. She was nearly two moons now, and already she'd been through too much heartache.

"You should speak to her," she heard Rain say quietly.

"What do I say?" It was her father's voice now. Salmon ignored him, watching more leaves fall. A large roar of thunder rumbled across the sky.

"You must help her," she heard Rain whisper.

"Shouldn't I help myself too?"

"But it is different for her."

Salmon tried to ignore their conversation, but she couldn't. She could hear them behind her in the den, and she unsheathed her claws and sank them into the soil.

Cherry Blossom had passed only about ten sunrises before. The tribe had been in mourning ever since, especially her and her father.

Salmon's heart ached as she thought of her beautiful mother. She remembered when her mother had become ill, she was welcomed into the healing den. Her mother had laid across a nest, thin and fragile. Salmon knew she was going to die the moment she saw her like that.

Oak was adamant though that she would live. He would visit her every day, while Salmon was only allowed to visit her once every few sunrises. She remembered that one day when she had sat by her mother in silence, only to feel Berry's tail lightly touch her.

Salmon had twitched and turned to face the cream she-cat. Berry had stared at her intently, then spoke. "You are a wise she-cat, Salmon. You have already accepted death when your father refuses to believe in it."

Salmon had sat there, not replying. She had not known if Berry was true about her wisdom. Wasn't it obvious that Cherry Blossom was in a terrible state?

Berry had not left her alone though that day. She continued to speak to her, saying, "Perhaps it is best if your stubborn father learns from you. I've seen you, Salmon, and I do believe you should be the one to rule after your father."

Salmon had replied that time. "Ruling is something I don't want to focus on."

Berry had left her alone after that, and several sunrises later Berry had broken the news to Oak and Salmon that Cherry Blossom would not live, and she would probably die later that night.

Oak had broken down easily, but Salmon had stood strong. She had looked at her paws, wondering why she was being punished with her mother's death.

That night, Salmon had slipped into the healing den near her mother's side. She had watched as her mother's eyes slowly opened, and she was amazed to see the slightest curl of lips from her mother.

"My dear Salmon," she purred.

"Mommy," Salmon said. She had not heard her mother's voice in days.

"You must help your father cope," Cherry Blossom said.

"But, Mommy, I'm a kit," Salmon complained.

"You're a very special kit," Cherry Blossom told her. "And you'll surely lead well."

Salmon hated cats bringing up the idea of her leading. At only a moon or so, she did not want to learn about leading the tribe.

"Take care of your father for me," Cherry Blossom told her.

"Why won't you stay, Mommy?" Salmon asked.

"I will stay with you, Salmon. Do you not remember the stories I told you? I shall be in the cherry blossoms every spring. Each spring, you may visit me," she purred.

"But spring is too long away," Salmon complained.

"With patience it isn't. There is something else I must tell you, Salmon. Something I have not told anyone," Cherry Blossom told her.

"What do you mean?"

"You are not the kit everyone thinks you are," she said.

Salmon had opened her mouth to ask for an explanation, but her mother had shut her eyes, refusing to speak anymore. Salmon had exited the den, hearing of her mother's passing in the morning.

Salmon attended the burial ceremony. Her mother had been buried next to a cherry blossom tree that would bloom in the springtime.

Afterwards, it was finished, and the tribe still could not function right. Oak refused to leave his den for days, and Salmon had sat alone in the birthing den.

Now she sat as rain poured down. It was obvious that winter was well on its way. Soon, the snow would fall, and afterwards, when it melted, the cherry blossoms would bloom. For some reason, this gave Salmon hope.

"Salmon," Oak said.

Salmon turned, facing her father. She had not looked at him in days, and his eyes were swollen from tears.

"Father," Salmon said. It was better to refer to him in a formal way now.

"Your mother is still with us, you know," Oak told her, sitting down beside his daughter.

"I know," Salmon said. "In the springtime she'll be in the cherry blossoms."

"Are you sure you're okay?" Oak asked. "You've been silent for days."

"I'm fine, but will you be, Father?" Salmon asked.

"When I speak to you, Salmon, it's as if I'm speaking to an adult member of the tribe," Oak told her.

Salmon heard the voices of Berry again and Cherry Blossom. *You are not the kit everyone thinks you are.* All she wanted to do was learn what that meant!

"I've always talked this way," Salmon told him.

"You've changed, Salmon," Oak said, standing up. He turned, facing her. "Look on the bright side," he paused, then spoke coldly, "You'll be leader now." With those words, he padded out of the den, leaving Salmon alone.

"He's broken," Salmon sighed, tracing her paws across the floor. Rain sat in the corner of the den as her kits slept. They'd be training very soon, in a matter of days. Salmon wasn't sure if her father would be able to organize the training in time. He was not coping well.

"Salmon," a voice came. Salmon froze, turning to see Storm. He stood tall over her, though he did not stare at her with the same negativity as usual.

"I-I'm sorry about your mom," he said.

"Don't be. It was for the best," Salmon told him.

He looked at her, shocked. She then exited the den, heading into the woods to visit her mother's grave.

"It is my great pleasure to welcome Storm, Honey, and Mouse in the honor of training to become full members of our tribe," Oak yowled. The three young trainees stood, their smiles wide with joy.

Salmon even managed to let out a smile too. She would not be depressed and forget to live like her father. No, she was able to cope with her mother's death.

"You know the drill," Oak said, turning to the three. "Anyone is allowed to train, but to prove yourself, you must first go into the woods to catch a piece of prey. Failure to do so will result in banishment from this tribe. We need the strongest members we can get."

Salmon watched as her father said this coldly, and not as spirited as usual. It was the tribe's tradition to send the trainees to catch a piece of prey. They got as much time as they pleased, but if a cat were to give up, they were exiled to live on their own, not worthy to be part of the tribe any longer. It rarely happened, though Salmon had heard stories of young cats being thrown into the woods.

The three ran off, leaving the others to do their daily needs. No cat seemed to care where Salmon went now, and she padded into the woods to the cherry blossom tree where her mother laid.

She stopped as she came across it. It was bare, preparing for winter. Salmon sighed, sitting down beside it. She knew her mother could only hear her speak when the blossoms were present, but this did not stop Salmon.

"Well, Mother, I'm sorry that Oak has not recovered. I've tried, but he won't cooperate," she said, slamming the ground. "I worry about his health. If he dies, that automatically makes me leader, but a kit can't lead. I've thought about what you said, Mother, and I still don't understand it. Who am I? Do I possess

powers that no other cat has? What do you mean?" she sighed. "If only you could hear me."

As she padded away, she watched as snow began to drift down. The first snow of the winter. She rushed back to the tribe center, heading towards her father's den. She had to speak to Oak.

"Daddy!" she yelled, instead of "Father".

He slowly made his way to the front of the den. "Is everything all right?"

"No," Salmon said, walking into his den. Normally, this would be considered rude, but she was his daughter and the future leader. She seemed to be able to do whatever she wished.

"Mommy wants you to get better," Salmon told him.

"You've spoken to Cherry Blossom?" Oak asked.

"No," Salmon growled. "But she told me to watch after you. You have to lead, Daddy! The tribe can't survive if you're like this. Cherry Blossom is still with us, and you need to realize that!"

"Are you criticizing my leadership?" he growled.

"No," Salmon said, sitting down. "I just want you to get better."

"These things take *time*, Salmon. You can't simply just get over the death of your own mate in a day. You did not just lose a mother, Salmon, but I lost my mate."

"What's the difference? The love is the same. Please, Daddy. Be yourself again."

"I can try, but there are no guarantees," Oak said. He stared at Salmon intently, then turned away. "You're just like your mother, always telling me what to do and how to solve my problems. It's hard to look at you without thinking of her. Now go, I have a tribe to lead."

Salmon smiled a little and left. Maybe things would get better...

Chapter 10

It had been a moon or so since Thymekit's incident, and Lemonkit had spent her days in the elders' den with Bluefur, Thymekit's sign language teacher. Lemonkit fully understood Thymekit's signs now, and she could talk to him easily. She only hoped that one day he would speak again.

As for Frostflight, her kits were due any day now, and Lemonkit couldn't wait for more playmates in the nursery. She knew Frostflight would spend less time with her though. It didn't matter though. It wasn't like Frostflight was her mother anyway.

Lemonkit awoke early to head to the elders' den with Thymekit. He was in a pleasant mood, and he smiled at Lemonkit as they padded into the den.

The dark gray she-cat sat in the den, her green eyes lighting up as she saw the two. "Thymekit, Lemonkit, it's good to see you," Bluefur purred.

Thymekit nodded, sitting down beside Lemonkit.

"What will we learn today?" Lemonkit asked.

"I'll be teaching Thymekit animals," Bluefur explained. "Now, Thymekit," she began. "Let's review the words you learned yesterday. Water."

Lemonkit watched as Thymekit swished his tail back and forth.

"Good," Bluefur told him. "How about sun?"

Lemonkit watched as Thymekit moved his paw around in a circular motion.

"Very good. We'll go to animals then," she explained. She began to move her paw back and forth quickly. "This means

mouse," she explained.

Lemonkit watched as Thymekit practiced. She was thrilled he could learn these words so easily.

As they continued to practice with other animals, Lemonkit eventually spoke. "How did you learn, Bluefur?"

Bluefur purred. "My brother was born mute, and for my moons, my parents looked for a cure or some way to allow him to speak. One day, we were walking in the woods when they found an old tom. He was a rogue, and at first, I was afraid of him. My mother asked if he knew how to cure an inability to speak. He only laughed and explained that there was no cure to allow a cat to talk. My entire family was disappointed, but the tom didn't stop talking. He explained that his mother had created a system of sign language for her sister. He continued to teach us, and eventually, I learned myself. I never knew I'd have to teach someone someday."

"It's very lucky you found that cat," Lemonkit told Bluefur.

Thymekit let out a nod.

"Very lucky indeed. I'm thrilled to be teaching you and Thymekit. Now, let's continue practicing."

For awhile longer, Lemonkit watched as Thymekit practiced, and she memorized the movements for herself. As the day began to continue, Lemonkit watched as Thymekit rubbed his paw across his stomach.

"You're hungry," Lemonkit interpreted. "I can get us some prey. What would you like?"

Thymekit shrugged, and Lemonkit padded out of the den, grabbing a mouse for them to share. As she grabbed it, she looked up, noticing Raspberrykit.

"You didn't tell me you were practicing," she argued.

"I'm sorry, Raspberrykit. You were sleeping. I'll teach you guys later, okay?"

"At least let me and the others join in for the rest of the lesson."

"All right. Go gather your siblings," Lemonkit told her. She watched as Raspberrykit went off, and Lemonkit headed back to the elders' den, handing Thymekit the mouse.

Immediately, the two dug in. Lemonkit had not had anything to eat since the morning, and she hadn't realized how hungry she was.

"We're here!" Mangokit screeched.

"It'd be nice if you quieted down," Bluefur grumbled. "Thymekit, please perform your words. Lemonkit will interpret."

"All right," Lemonkit said, watching as Thymekit began movements. "Mouse, bird, squirrel, log."

Thymekit rolled his eyes.

"Fox! Fox, sorry," Lemonkit squeaked, looking down at her paws. Thymekit performed another motion, and Lemonkit opened her mouth to speak, only to be cut off by Hailfrost.

"Frostflight's kits are coming!" he exclaimed.

Lemonkit froze, staring at her "father". "Is she all right?" Lemonkit asked.

"Come with me, Lemonkit," Hailfrost instructed. "The rest of you kits should stay in here or at least go to your mother. Ambershine's asked for the den to be cleared out."

Thymekit performed a motion which Lemonkit interpreted as "I'll come with you".

"Oh, you don't have to," Lemonkit told him. But Thymekit was adamant, and he padded with Lemonkit towards the nursery.

Hailfrost padded inside, instructing Lemonkit and Thymekit to stay outside. Lemonkit sighed, tossing a stick. Thymekit

remained silent, like usual. She missed his voice, and she wished she could hear it again.

She felt his tail on her shoulder, and she turned, facing him. "Do you think Frostflight will be okay?" she asked.

He nodded, then crossed his tail back and forth, asking what was wrong.

"It's nothing, really," Lemonkit sighed. Thymekit continued to stare at her though, and she sighed. "I just-what if Frostflight doesn't care about me anymore? She'll have new kits to deal with."

Thymekit set his tail on her shoulder, then moved his paw around. Lemonkit understood it as "she'll always love you".

"You think so?" Lemonkit asked.

Thymekit nodded.

"Thank you, Thymekit," Lemonkit said, licking his cheek. She was interrupted as Hailfrost came out, a smile on his face.

"Come in, Lemonkit. There's some kits you need to meet."

Lemonkit turned back to look at Thymekit who encouraged her to walk with Hailfrost. She smiled, following him into the den. Frostflight sat on her nest with four kits suckling away.

"Have you named them?" Lemonkit asked.

Frostflight shook her head. "Not yet. Hailfrost and I were just deciding now."

Lemonkit looked at the kits, smiling at her new denmates. There was a fluffy gray she-cat, a ginger tom with black paws and a white muzzle, a silver she-cat, and a calico tom.

"They're really beautiful, Frostflight," Lemonkit told her.

"Thank you," Frostflight purred. She turned to Hailfrost, smiling. "Could we call the fluffy gray she-cat Pearkit and the ginger

tom Desertkit?"

"Of course," Hailfrost purred.

"You name the other two," Frostflight instructed.

"We can call the silver she-cat Troutkit," Hailfrost said. He then turned to Lemonkit. "Why don't you name the other tom?"

"Oh, no, it's all right," Lemonkit told him.

"Don't be absurd, Lemonkit," Frostflight told her. "You're our daughter as much as these kits. They're practically your siblings. Go on."

"How about Spotkit?" Lemonkit suggested.

"Perfect," Frostflight purred.

"Let's let Frostflight rest," Hailfrost said, leading Lemonkit out of the den. As soon as she exited, Koikit came racing up to her.

"Are they cute? How many are there? What are their names?"

"Yes, they're cute," Lemonkit purred. "There are four--two she-cats, two toms. Their names are Pearkit, Desertkit, Troutkit, and Spotkit."

"I'm surprised you answered all her questions," Windkit snorted. "Better say good-bye to your kithood."

"What do you mean?" Lemonkit asked.

"Frostflight has her own kits now. She won't have to care about you anymore," Koikit told her.

Beside her, Thymekit growled.

"That's a lie," Lemonkit hissed. "Those kits are practically my siblings, and I even got to name one of them. So shut your mouth!"

"Way to go," Lemonkit heard Raspberrykit whisper. She and Raspberrykit had bonded a lot lately, and Lemonkit had found Windkit and Koikit a bit rude at times. Mangokit seemed to be busy playing with Arcticpaw, leaving Lemonkit alone with Raspberrykit and Thymekit, not that she minded.

"Whatever," Koikit rolled her eyes, heading off with Windkit.

Later in the evening, Lemonkit padded back into the nursery, finding Frostflight asleep with the four kits. Sighing, Lemonkit settled down near the corner of the wall, wondering if Windkit was right. What if she was being replaced?

"Lemonkit," Frostflight said.

Lemonkit opened her eyes. "What is it?"

"Come, sleep by me," she instructed. "The kits won't bite, I promise," she laughed.

Lemonkit padded over, settling down between Frostflight's paws. She let out a yawn and rested her head on Frostflight's large paw.

"Good night," Frostflight whispered.

"Good night," Lemonkit replied, closing her eyes. Slowly, she drifted off to sleep.

Chapter 11

It had been a moon or so since Sunrise had come to her new home. She had been treated and fed well, and she was beginning to like her home. If only her sisters weren't with her. They had to be the most annoying sisters she could've ever asked for.

Sunrise opened her eyes, finding light shining through her owner's window. She slept in the boy's room after becoming too scared to sleep in the laundry room. She found his room more comforting, and she was able to get a decent nap in there.

"Sunrise," he said.

She slowly stretched, padding outside of the boy's room to come into the kitchen. The tuna had already been placed in the bowls, and Sunrise rushed forward towards her bowl, sticking her head into the tuna bowl.

"Sure took you a long time to get up," Holly complained.

"Yeah," Polly said, agreeing with Holly.

"So? That means I got more beauty sleep than you two," Sunrise told them.

Polly and Holly seemed shocked.

"Pass over that tuna, Polly," Holly growled.

Polly slipped a paw underneath Sunrise's, causing her to slip. Immediately, Polly pushed the bowl towards the two, and they began snacking on Sunrise's breakfast.

"Hey! No fair!" Sunrise said, trying to push her sisters away.

"What are you going to do about it, runt?" Holly laughed.

Sunrise groaned. "It's not my fault I'm one of the smallest of

the litter!"

"You're right. It's not your fault at all. It's not like you could try to take this tuna back from us to prove you're not a runt," Polly laughed.

Angry, Sunrise kicked at the she-cat's legs, making her fall into the bowl. Sunrise laughed, jumping up and down.

Polly opened her eyes, tuna covering her face. "Why, you little..."

"Have you been practicing that?" Holly asked.

"How could I have practiced kicking?" Sunrise asked.

Holly shook her head. "Nevermind," she said, helping Polly out of the bowl. "Take your tuna back! It's all gone by now!"

Sunrise shook her head, looking at her bowl. It was as if her sisters had sucked out everything in it. She sighed, her stomach growling. Oh well. She'd just have to wait until the evening again.

She looked up, noticing Holly and Polly playing with a mouse toy.

"I want to play!" Sunrise exclaimed.

Polly laughed. "As if!"

Sunrise rolled her eyes, leaping over the two. She grabbed the mouse from them, cheering. "I win! I win!" Sunrise exclaimed.

"Stop cheating!" Holly growled.

"How am I cheating?"

"You can't use the table to jump over us," Polly complained.

"But I didn't use the table! I just jumped over you," Sunrise told them.

"As if a kit like you could leap over us. You'd have to jump a

good eight inches off the ground!"

"But I just did!"

"We don't like playing with you," Polly complained.

"You don't really like me at all," Sunrise grumbled.

"I wonder if she's like those cats that Cracker was talking about," Holly whispered.

"What cats? Who's Cracker?"

"Oh, that's right," Polly laughed. "You haven't been outside yet."

"What cats?" Sunrise asked.

"The clan cats," Holly told her. "But you'll have to talk to Cracker if you want more information."

"Why can't you guys tell me?" Sunrise complained.

"Go find it out for yourself!" Polly hissed.

Sunrise growled, heading off to the backyard door. She sat down by it, pawing at the door. Sunrise groaned to find two hands picking her up.

"Oh, no, Sunrise," came a feminine adult voice. "No going outside."

Sunrise looked back, sighing. Who were these clan cats? What were they like?

Sunrise was set back down in the boy's room. She sighed, curling up in her bed. Why did Holly and Polly not believe anything she said? What if she was like these clan cats? What would that mean?

Sunrise had to get out somehow. Slowly, she slipped out of the room, heading back into the kitchen. The glass door was still

closed, but she wondered if the cat door might be open. She had heard Holly and Polly talk about the cat door and how they could go through, but it had never been open when Sunrise was near it.

Sunrise headed towards the small door, pawing at it. It was covered, not allowing Sunrise to go through.

"No fair!" she growled.

She clawed at the cover of the door, gasping as it slowly came off. With all her might, she pushed the cover off. It landed softly on the ground, and Sunrise stuck her paw through. Immediately, she could feel cool air on her paw.

"Yes!" she exclaimed, racing through the door. She came outside onto a lawn, smiling. The backyard! She had never seen it before!

"Cracker!" she called, hoping whoever Cracker was would show himself.

There was a rattle of bushes, and a young tom peeked his head out. "You're not Holly or Polly!"

"No, but they said you knew about clan cats, and I want to know!"

"Want to know what? You want to know about those vicious cats?"

Vicious? "Yes, I do," Sunrise told him. "What are they like?"

Cracker sat down, his golden pelt reflecting in the sunlight. "I only know stories from my grandfather. He was a clan cat. These cats are tough. They live in the forest, fighting for survival. They must catch their own food, even if it means fighting for it. They live in groups, called clans, and they all care for each other. They believe in StarClan, the place of their old ancestors. They're very good hunters and fighters."

"Holly and Polly said I was like a clan cat," Sunrise told Cracker. "Why is that?"

Cracker shrugged. "Did you steal their food?"

"No. I mean, they stole my food, and I got it back, plus I leapt over them. They said it was impossible."

"You leapt over them and stole their food?"

"No, I kicked Polly and got my food back, and apparently I leapt eight inches into the air. They seemed amazed," Sunrise explained.

Cracker laughed. "Maybe you have clan blood in you. You're related to them, right?"

"Yes, but, how can I do clan cat stuff if they can't?"

Cracker shrugged. "Maybe it only works on some of your siblings. Was your mother a clan cat? How about your father?"

"They were both kittypets."

"Maybe they aren't your parents."

Sunrise laughed. "They are. I look just like my father."

"Maybe."

"Is this StarClan place real?"

"How should I know?" Cracker asked. "It all seems like stupid tales to me. Maybe clan cats don't even exist!"

"You just said your grandfather was one."

"Maybe he made it up. Oh well. I'm heading off. Don't call me here again. What's your name?"

"Sunrise."

"Don't bother calling me here again, Sunrise. I only answer to Holly and Polly," he growled, leaping over the fence.

Sunrise sighed, padding back inside. It didn't make sense.

Her parents were kittypets. She couldn't be part clan-cat. Maybe she was just naturally gifted. That's right, just gifted.

Still though, she was interested in these clan cats, and she desperately wanted to learn more. What was it that made them so special? How tough were they? She supposed she would never know.

Yawning, Sunrise curled up in the corner of the room and fell asleep.

Chapter 12

After Cloudstar's unfortunate death, Thornfrost had been declared the new leader of SnowClan, and he had taken on his new name of Thornstar. Lifekit could tell Mousestripe was proud of her mate.

In other news, Pinethorn had been named as deputy, something Lifekit had not been expecting. Sure, the tom was a good warrior, but she hadn't thought he'd become deputy.

Lifekit lazily opened her eyes, spotting Tasha's kits playing around. She had tried to take her father's words to heart about what he had said about them, but she still had a hard time accepting the kits.

She turned her head, watching Splashleap's daughters sleep soundly by her. She noticed Blueocean sleeping behind the she-cat, her stomach plump. Any day now she would give birth to Pinethorn's kits.

Lifekit yawned and stretched her legs, padding out of the nursery. No cat really cared where she went, especially because all her family was located outside the nursery.

She looked around, trying to spot her father. She only got to talk to him a few times a day, and she only wished she could speak to him more. All the fathers loved to visit their kits in the nursery.

Lifekit looked up, seeing Mousestripe sharing a rabbit with Thornstar. She padded over, a grin on her face.

"Hello, Lifekit," Thornstar said.

"Hi," she mewed, smiling. She turned to Mousestripe, her blue eyes fixed on her grandmother.

"Do you know where my dad is?" she asked.

Mousestripe pondered for a moment. "I think he's in the warriors den, or maybe visiting his parents in the nursery."

Lifekit had never really heard too much about Patchfur's parents, only that she knew they were elders. She barely remembered their names.

"Thanks," she purred, running off through the camp to find her father. She bumped into him as he exited the elders' den, causing her to be thrown back.

"What are you doing outside the nursery?" her father demanded.

"I was coming to see you, Daddy! Maybe we could play!" she suggested.

Just by her father's sigh she could tell he wouldn't play.

"Daddy is a warrior, and he's got a lot to do," he explained.

"But Stormnight and Graytail always have enough time to play with me! Why don't you?" she whimpered.

"Stormnight and Graytail do not have as much duties," he quickly replied.

"But you aren't deputy! You're barely a senior warrior! You know, the daddies of the other kits always visit their children. Why don't you?" she asked.

Patchfur let out a sigh. "The other kits have mothers to care for them."

"But I have no mother, only a father!" she complained. "If Mommy were still alive, would you visit the nursery?"

Patchfur looked down at his paws. "I suppose I might. I'll play with you later, okay? But right now, I have a patrol. Head back to the nursery! Maybe Mousestripe will take you out later," he said, rushing off.

Lifekit stood, watching as he walked off. Just when she thought her father would be an actual father and play with her, he said no. Why did he act so odd around his daughter? What would it be like if her mother were here?

Lifekit made her way to the nursery, only to be blocked by Cheetahwing.

"Why can't I come in?" Lifekit asked the pregnant queen.

"Blueocean's about to give birth. We need everyone out of the nursery," the spotted she-cat explained.

"But-," she began.

"I'll take her out," Stormnight said, setting his tail on Lifekit's shoulder. "Come on, let's walk around camp."

Lifekit looked over at Cheetahwing one last time before following Stormnight.

Though Stormnight and Graytail were brothers, they were both so different. Stormnight was fun, but more serious, like her father. Graytail, however, was a kit trapped inside a warrior's body.

"Do you think Pinethorn will visit his kits?" Lifekit asked Stormnight.

"Of course. Why wouldn't he? I'll be visiting Cheetahwing and my kits when they're born."

"Daddy doesn't visit me," she complained.

Stormnight froze. "So this is what it's about? Your father?"

Lifekit nodded sadly.

"Look, your father is busy, and he was busy before you were born. He loves you very much, Lifekit, and if it's any help at all, he probably does not visit you too often because you remind him of Shinypelt."

Anger spiked through Lifekit's pelt. "So he doesn't want to visit me only because I look like my mom?!" she exclaimed.

"Losing someone is hard, especially your mate. I lost my sister, though I don't ignore you. We all deal with this differently."

Lifekit sighed. "I wish I knew my mother."

"But you do," Stormnight pointed out. "She lives in you."

"You think so?" she asked.

"Of course. Come on, let's go see if Blueocean has given birth yet," he said.

Lifekit nodded, following him to the nursery. Cheetahwing no longer guarded the nursery, and it seemed like cats could walk in willingly.

Slowly, Stormnight and Lifekit padded into the nursery. As cats moved aside, Lifekit could see three kits nursing beside Blueocean.

There was a white tom, a silver tabby she-cat, and a silver-blue tom.

"They're beautiful," Lifekit purred.

There was a large sound as Pinethorn stumbled into the nursery.

"Are the kits born?" he asked.

Blueocean laughed. "Yes, they're right here."

Pinethorn smiled, standing beside her. "What will we name them?"

"The white tom can be Marshkit, the silver she-cat, Ripplekit. And the silver-blue..." Her voice trailed off, and Lifekit was sure she could see her gulp.

"Goosekit," she announced.

"Way to let the father name any," Stormnight mumbled.

"It's fine, really," Pinethorn reassured them. Lifekit stared at the tom, looking at his mucky brown pelt. It seemed the only part of his fur color that had made it in the litter was Marshkit's white pelt. Still, the kits were beautiful. Lifekit couldn't wait to have new playmates.

She jumped as she felt someone touch her shoulder. She turned

around, staring into her father s green eyes.

"Come on, let's go play," he said.

Chapter 13

A month or so had passed, and Salmon had been getting along well in her tribe. Her father had been recovering, and though he hadn't fully gotten over his mate's death, he was beginning to treat Salmon more like his daughter.

In other news, Storm, Honey, and Mouse had all caught prey, and they were training to become good fighters and hunters. Salmon knew that in a short amount of time, she'd be able to train too.

Her paws tingled as she thought of training. If she was to be leader of the rogue pack someday, she had to be good hunter and fighter. When her mother had died, she promised herself that she would be the best hunter and fighter there ever was.

Salmon still thought of her mother's words. She did not know what her mother had meant when she said Salmon was not the kit everyone thought she was. Maybe she meant she was stronger than the other kits. She still had no clue what the words had meant, and she had not told anyone else, not even her father, about the words.

Salmon padded out of the birthing den, finding her father speaking to other cats. At the sight of his daughter, his eyes lit up.

"Hello, Salmon."

"Hi, Father!" she exclaimed. "What are you doing?"

"Just sending out cats to get prey," he told her. "How are you?"

"Good," Salmon replied. "I'll be training soon!"

"Not yet though," Oak told her. "You still have another month. You still have to pass the ceremony."

"I can pass it," Salmon argued. "I'll catch the biggest piece of prey in the forest."

Oak laughed at this. "I'm sure you will, but just because you are of royal descendent doesn't mean you'll be a good hunter and fighter."

Salmon frowned. "You don't mean that."

"I do. Sometimes, we expect so much from someone, only to find that they aren't who they say they are."

You are not the kit everything thinks you are. The words echoed in Salmon's head. She shook the thought away, continuing her conversation with her father.

"But I will be the next leader, right?"

"We'll see how your training goes," Oak told her.

"But, I'm your only kin," Salmon complained.

"That might be so, but what if I get another mate?"

"You're not going to forget Mother, are you?"

"What? No!" Oak argued. "What I'm saying is that there have been circumstances when the only kin is not fit to be leader and a new family rules."

"Oh," Salmon said sadly, looking down at her paws.

"I'm not saying that will happen to you."

"How were you chosen?" Salmon asked.

"Well, normally the male of the litter is automatically leader."

"That's not fair," Salmon complained.

"These are our customs," Oak hissed. His anger faded, and he continued to speak. "Anyway, I had a sister and a brother. My

sister was automatically out of the running. As for my brother, my father had to choose between us, and he chose me because I was the better hunter and fighter, and I could lead."

"What did your brother do afterwards?"

"He left the rogue pack. Normally, the one who is not chosen is shamed, and they end up leaving."

"What about your sister?" Salmon asked.

"She eventually died from a sickness, but she remained in the rogue pack," Oak explained.

"But, that means if I'm replaced...I'll have to leave?"

"Not necessarily. My brother chose to leave. The option is always up to the cat. Seeing someone lead though and thinking that could've been you creates a terrible feeling inside you, and sometimes that causes you to leave."

"I'll be sure to be the best leader!" Salmon told him.

"That's good," Oak laughed. "Why don't you go talk to the elders? I'm sure they'd be thrilled to share stories with you."

"Okay," Salmon squeaked, running off to the elders' den. Upon her arrival, the older cats were thrilled to see her.

"Hello, Salmon," an older she-cat said. Salmon did not remember her name, but she smiled and sat down next to the old she-cat.

"Oak says you tell good stories," she squeaked.

"Why, of course we do," an older brown tabby told her.

"Can I hear some?" Salmon asked.

"Of course!" the old ginger she-cat exclaimed. She pondered for a moment before speaking again. "Have you heard the story about the big storm?"

Salmon shook her head.

"Haven't you got older ones?" the brown tabby tom asked.

"Oh, quiet," the she-cat replied. "You said you have not heard the story of the storm before, Salmon?"

"No, I haven't," Salmon admitted.

"I'm surprised. I expected you had. I'll tell it to you now," the ginger she-cat said, lightly wrapping her tail around Salmon.

Salmon tingled at the she-cat's touch, thinking of her mother who used to wrap her tail around her. Oh, how she missed Cherry Blossom.

"The clouds were gathering up ahead, rolling into the sky. At the time, Cherry Blossom was pregnant with you, Salmon, and in a few days, she would be giving birth. Many cats tried to reason with Oak to leave, thinking perhaps we were being punished. Berry especially tried to convince him that they should find a safer place. Oak was adamant though that they stay. He wanted Cherry Blossom to give birth peacefully.

"Oak, in a state of denial, claimed that the storm would pass quickly, and it was nothing more than a small summer storm. Many cats believed their leader, but I didn't. I had never seen such dark clouds before. Something wasn't right.

"During the middle of the night, thunder boomed throughout the forest. I woke with a start, frightened. Rain pounded down, and lightning flashed in the sky. At first, Oak told us to stay put. Then, the camp began to flood.

"There was panic, and Oak then admitted that the cats leave. The crowd was wild, and pandemonium had broken loose. Cherry Blossom got caught in the storm was was washed away. Oak told us to search for her, but cats were too busy panicking. We had to flee quickly, and Oak was forced to leave his mate.

"Ever since, we've been in this forest," the ginger she-cat explained. "We were thrilled when Cherry Blossom returned with

you. It was good to know her delivery had gone well."

"I had thought I was born here," Salmon admitted.

"Don't take it to heart, Salmon. You're still part of this rogue group, even if you weren't born in the walls of the birthing den."

"Where did we live before?" Salmon asked, now interested.

"In a large forest with tall trees and rushing rivers. This forest is good too, though I miss the old one. It was where I grew up," the she-cat explained. "Of course, the old forest did have some clan cats nearby."

"Clan cats?" Salmon asked.

"Oh, my! Have you never heard about clan cats?!" the ginger she-cat exclaimed.

"No cat has ever mentioned it to me before," Salmon admitted.

"Why, they're sort of like the rogue pack, but in different ways," the she-cat explained. "They live in groups called "clans", and they do not move around like we often do. They have dens like us, but their customs are different."

"How so?"

"They have weird names for starters. Sure, the beginning of their name is some nature object like us, but what follows is some sort of description, like Fireleaf."

"There are no such thing as fireleaves!" Salmon exclaimed.

"But these cats are different from us, Salmon. They don't believe their souls live in the nature items around them. They believe in StarClan, a clan in the sky full of the souls of the passed."

"How odd," Salmon remarked. Every cat knew they lived in nature! It was where they were born and where they died.

"What else?" Salmon asked, curious to learn more.

"They are apprentices in training, not hunters and fighters. They learn to hunt and fight, but they don't have a ritual like us. All cats can hunt and fight without having an initiation. Before becoming a 'warrior', as they call it, they have to pass a test, like us, I suppose."

"Perhaps we're not that different," Salmon suggested.

"But we are," the ginger she-cat complained. "Many clans live in one forest, and each month when the moon is full, they gather peacefully. All the other time, they are enemies."

"Why gather peacefully if you want to kill them in the morning?" Salmon asked.

The she-cat shrugged. "They are odd cats, and it is better not to get caught up in their business."

"I won't," Salmon promised the old she-cat.

"Good girl!"

"Thanks for the story. It was...interesting," Salmon admitted. "What is your name?"

The cat smiled. "Lightning."

"Well, thank you, Lightning," Salmon said, exiting the den. Could the storm have to do with Cherry Blossom's mysterious message?

Chapter 14

"Tag!" Raspberrykit called, lightly touching her tail to Lemonkit's shoulder.

"Hey!" Lemonkit called in response, beginning to chase after Raspberrykit. The ginger she-cat giggled, racing around the nursery. Thymekit raced around too, though he couldn't yell "tag" like the others. He was good at playing at hide-and-seek though.

Lemonkit leapt into the air, tagging Thymekit. "Tag," she purred.

Thymekit smiled then began to chase after his sister and friend. Lemonkit giggled as she raced around the nursery. Grumpy queens trying to sleep opened an eye as she went by, and younger kits looked around, gazing at their older playmates.

"Lemonkit," Frostflight's familiar voice came.

"Pause the game, guys," Lemonkit announced, padding over to her mother. "Yes?"

Frostflight let out a gentle smile. "I need to walk around. Can you watch the kits or at least let them play with you?"

Lemonkit looked down at her four siblings, all of them eager to play.

"I guess," Lemonkit said, still uneasy about the decision.

"Great, thanks," Frostflight told her, padding out of the den.

"Can we play again now?" Raspberrykit asked.

Thymekit nodded in agreement with his sister.

"I don't know," Lemonkit admitted. "We have to play with them now."

"We could play tag," Desertkit boasted.

"But we don't want to trample you guys," Lemonkit explained.

"We're one moon old!" Pearkit complained. "We won't get trampled!"

Lemonkit turned, facing her friends. "Should we let them play?"

Thymekit nodded while Raspberrykit shook her head.

"I don't know," Lemonkit said, turning back to the four kits.

"You're not a very fun sister," Spotkit complained.

"I don't want you guys getting hurt," Lemonkit told the four.

"Just let us play!" Deserkit begged. "Please, we won't get in the way."

Lemonkit looked back at her friends one last time and sighed. "Well, okay, but try not to annoy the other queens and kits. Be careful too."

"We will be," Troutkit assured her.

"Who starts off?" Raspberrykit asked.

"I will!" Desertkit called, waving his ginger tail into the air.

"Okay, Desertkit starts off," Lemonkit called out. "Everyone, run!" she shouted.

The cats began to race through the nursery, laughing and giggling. Though Desertkit was fast for his age, he couldn't run quicker than three four-moon-old kits.

"Tag!" Desertkit called.

"No fair! I was resting!" Pearkit complained, her fluffy fur spiking up in anger.

"You got tagged, so you're it," Spotkit told her.

"That's not fair though!" Pearkit complained once again.

"You're it, Pearkit," Lemonkit told her.

"Fine," she grumbled, beginning to chase her siblings and other kits through the nursery. Koikit and Windkit sat next to each other, growling as Troutkit tumbled into one of them.

"Lemonkit!" Koikit complained.

Lemonkit paused for a moment, causing Spotkit to collide with her.

"Sorry, Spotkit," Lemonkit said, looking down at the calico tom. "You okay?"

"Fine," Spotkit replied, standing back up.

Lemonkit looked up at Koikit, waiting for an explanation.

"It's too crowded in here for seven kits to be running around!" Koikit complained.

"They're small kits, Koikit! They won't take up much room, honestly," Lemonkit told her. "If you're so bothered by that, go outside. Get some fresh air!"

"Don't tell me what to do!" Koikit complained.

"Lemonkit is right, Koikit," Raspberrykit announced to her sister. "If you need some quiet then go outside. Go to the elders' den if you want for some stories."

"You don't rule the nursery," Koikit hissed.

"Girls, quit fighting!" Daisyfeather spat, obviously getting annoyed of her kits' arguments by now. "Koikit, take your brother outside. Raspberrykit and Thymekit you can also play tag outside. Where's Mangokit?"

Thymekit pointed his tail to Arcticpaw who sat outside, playing with Mangokit.

"I have to watch my siblings though," Lemonkit argued. "I don't know if Frostflight wants me bringing them outside."

"I didn't say your name, Lemonkit," Daisyfeather told her. "Raspberrykit, Thymekit, out! Let your mother sleep!"

Raspberrykit headed out of the den. Thymekit stood in the doorway, waiting for Lemonkit, but she shook her head.

"Sorry guys," Lemonkit told them. "I'll catch up with you later."

Thymekit disappeared outside, leaving Lemonkit alone with four kits to look after.

"That's no fair that our game was cancelled!" Troutkit complained, sitting down on her nest.

Lemonkit felt bad for her siblings. It wasn't fair that the game had gotten cancelled. She sat down for a moment and thought of something for them to do. It was as if a lightbulb had gone on when Lemonkit got a sudden idea.

"How about we go to the elders' den?" she suggested. "They tell really good stories."

"But I thought you just went there to learn sign language," Spotkit complained.

"No, the elders are really good at telling stories," Lemonkit admitted.

"Frostflight tells good stories," Pearkit told Lemonkit.

"Yes, but the elders tell better ones," Lemonkit told them. "Come on, let's go!" she announced.

The four kits followed in a single line behind her as they walked about ten pawsteps to the elders' den. Bluefur's face lit up to

see Lemonkit entering with the four kits.

"What have you brought here, Lemonkit?"

"I have to watch them," Lemonkit explained. "We're here to listen to stories."

"Ask Poppyfur for some," Bluefur suggested. "She tells great ones!"

Lemonkit turned, spotting the brown tabby she-cat near the corner of the den. At the sound of her name, her ears pricked up.

"What was that?"

"We're here for a story, Poppyfur," Lemonkit explained.

"Has Bluefur been telling stories again?" Poppyfur laughed, sitting down. "And you brought Frostflight's kits with you!"

"She's our sister," Pearkit corrected.

Poppyfur looked up at Lemonkit and tilted her head.

"Just go along with it," Lemonkit told her.

"Oh, well," Poppyfur said, tilting her head as she thought of a good story. "Why not tell the story of the battle between SnowClan and NightClan?"

"I thought we were allies!" Lemonkit pointed out.

"No clans are allies. We may work together in battle, but we are enemies," Poppyfur explained.

"What about the MoonClan battle?" Spotkit asked. "I always hear cats talking about it."

"Well, there were two, but I am not a SnowClan elder, so I can't tell you about the first battle."

"When did the first one take place?" Lemonkit asked.

Poppyfur shrugged. "Many generations ago, before NightClan stepped foot in this forest. But I can tell you all about the other battle," she suggested.

"I want to hear about it!" Pearkit exclaimed.

"Okay," Poppyfur said. "It was leaf-fall, and the first few leaves had just begin to fall. It was a quiet day when the attack began. Early in the morning, Silverstar made a huge announcement that we were going to fight alongside with SnowClan. Cats had thought we'd take place in the battle for awhile, but we'd never had any official announcement.

"Cats stepped forward to fight. Even I decided to fight, being my old self. At first, it seemed like we would not win the battle. Then, out of the crowd came a cat I had never seen before. She looked a lot like you, Lemonkit. Her pelt was white and gold, and her eyes were a fierce blue. Her name was Shinypelt.

"Right at that time, Moonstar appeared as her Dark Forest-self. She claimed Shinypelt could not defeat MoonClan and all the powers of the Dark Forest, but Shinypelt ignored her and told her she could. Unsure what was happening, we all gasped as Shinypelt's pelt lit up bright. It blinded most of us. What I could see though was her being lifted into the sky before a large gleam of light blasted through the entire forest.

"When we could all regain vision, the MoonClan cats were gone. At first, we went to celebrate, but we found that Shinypelt was dead."

"That's terrible!" Pearkit screeched.

"She made a sacrifice for all of us," Poppyfur explained. "Right when we were about to leave, blue lights began to dazzle around her, and she was lifted into the sky. The light was brighter this time, and when I could see again, I saw not a body on the ground, but a newborn kit."

"A newborn kit?" Lemonkit asked.

"StarClan works in mysterious ways," Poppyfur explained.

"Frostflight says I was found the day of the battle," Lemonkit explained. "Was I the newborn kit?"

"Don't be silly," Poppyfur laughed. "That kit is growing up in SnowClan. Shinypelt's mate took the kit. No, you were found in NightClan territory. You were a young kit too, but you weren't the SnowClan kit."

Lemonkit felt her heart sink. Just when she thought that maybe she had found who she was and what she had come from, it hadn't been the right cat. She wondered what that other kitten was doing in SnowClan. Lemonkit didn't even know her name.

"Thanks for the story," Deserkit squeaked.

"Yes, thank you," Lemonkit said, dipping her head towards the elder. She exited the den with her siblings, leading them back to the nursery. Only a few moments later, Frostflight entered.

"Mommy, Poppyfur told us stories!" Spotkit exclaimed.

"Did you take them to the elders' den?" Frostflight asked Lemonkit.

"Yes, I thought it would be all right," Lemonkit explained, hoping she wouldn't get a lecture.

"Yes, that's fine," Frostflight purred. She turned her head, watching the kits play. "It seems like they had a good time. I know I can trust you with them."

"Oh, thanks," Lemonkit purred.

She padded over to her nest, listening to the distant cries of her siblings. "I'm Moonstar! You can't beat me!"

"No, I'm Shinypelt!" That was Pearkit's voice.

Maybe taking them to the elders' den was not the best idea, Lemonkit thought. Still, she had learned a bit more about what had

happened that day. Maybe she'd discover her past sooner than she expected.

Chapter 15

Sunrise lazily opened her eyes to find no sunlight streaming through the window. Instead, she found clouds strolling across the sky, most likely from the winter storms that had been coming in.

While she expected to hear the sound of rain pattering against the window, she saw a new substance falling from the sky--snow. She remembered how her mother would speak of it at times, and it was not until now that Sunrise realized what she had meant.

Curious, Sunrise slowly crept out of her bed and leapt onto the windowsill, watching the snow fall lightly. The ground was covered in a white blanket, concealing all dirt and plants.

"Wait until Holly and Polly hear about this," she whispered, leaping down from the windowsill.

Sunrise padded outside into the kitchen to find a bowl of cat food all ready for her. Holly and Polly had not yet risen, giving Sunrise time to eat before they stole any food from her.

Sunrise ate quickly, trying to consume as much food as she could before her sisters woke up. She had to admit, they were the worst sisters she could have ever hoped for. They teased her for her small size, stole her food, and would not let her take part in any activities they were taking part in.

Sunrise licked the bowl clean, and she turned to Holly and Polly's bowls, tempted to eat their food. She hesitated for a moment, then walked away. No, she wouldn't act like them, even if they did deserve it.

Hearing familiar pawsteps, Sunrise pricked her ears, watching the sisters padding into the kitchen.

"I hope you haven't been eating our food," Holly sneered, pawing at Sunrise's ear.

Sunrise growled. "I didn't touch your food."

"I bet she's lying," Polly pointed out. "Look at how her stomach sags!"

Sunrise hissed at her sister, unsheathing her claws. She looked down at her stomach, seeing it was as thin as ever. "I'm in fit shape unlike you two! I barely get to eat while you two stuff yourselves until you cannot eat anymore. Look at yourself!" she growled.

It was true. Holly and Polly were a lot heavier than they had been when they first arrived while Sunrise remained the same weight.

"Ignore her," Holly growled.

It was obvious that Sunrise had ticked them off now. She was tempted to mess with them even more, though she was afraid she'd get a scratch down her leg. The two weren't afraid to injure her.

Sure, the nice boy would clean Sunrise up, but they'd usually claw at her again before the wound healed.

"Have you seen the snow?" Sunrise called.

"Snow?" Polly asked.

Sunrise rolled her eyes. "Yes, the white stuff that falls from the sky. Snow. Haven't you heard of it before? I thought you two knew everything."

"We do!" Polly claimed, stomping her foot down.

"Well, you didn't see the snow," Sunrise said quickly, rushing off towards the cat door.

Her owners didn't seem to care if she went outside now. At times, the boy would stay outside with her, and they'd play in the backyard. Whenever Holly and Polly were there, however, they would claim the backyard for themselves, like it was their own

territory.

Territory, a clan cat word. Sunrise could not stop thinking of the mysterious clan cats that lived nearby. They were legendary, and she was eager to learn more about them. Ever since that day Cracker had told her of them, she had wanted to meet one, learn about them, maybe join a clan.

But would the boy cry if she left? Probably...

Sunrise felt cold air rush against her as snow fell down. Slowly, she stepped into the snow, jumping up at the cold sensation that went up her leg and filled her entire body. It was something she had never felt before.

She continued to walk through the snow, beginning to enjoy the wind blowing against her pelt. Snow drifted down onto her, not that she minded. Unlike her sisters, she had a thick coat that was capable of keeping out the cold snow.

With the backyard to herself, Sunrise wondered if it would be a good idea to practice some fighting moves she had been teaching herself. One was to leap onto a tree and leap off gracefully.

"I'll try that," she said to herself, racing to the icy tree that sat in the corner of the backyard.

Seeing the slimy surface, Sunrise wondered if it would be a good idea to climb the tree or not.

"If I don't practice, I'll never learn," she reminded herself. She backed up and began to run towards the tree. The snow tugged at her legs though, and her leap was wimpy. She scrambled as she grabbed ahold of the tree, and she jumped off, landing into the snow face-first.

Her face covered in snow, she groaned, standing up. She wiped the snow off her now-damp pelt and decided to try again.

Putting a lot of pressure on her paws would cause her to sink, but if she was light on her feet, she could achieve a good jump.

"Light on my paws," she said, practicing. She walked carefully on the snow, trying not to put too much pressure on her paws. She was surprised to find herself walking on top of the snow. It was as if she were walking on air!

After practicing, she decided it was time to practice again. She backed up, then began to sprint, remaining light on her paws. This time, she gained speed, and when she leapt, her claws were extended, grasping onto the tree the second her claws touched it. She instantly kicked off with her back legs, landing on the snow perfectly.

"I did it! I did it!" she exclaimed, jumping up and down. "I'm a clan cat!"

Her excitement was not long though. Only a few seconds after cheering for her victory, a familiar nagging voice came from the door.

"Sunrise, what are you doing?!" Holly exclaimed.

Sunrise looked to see her two sisters sitting near the door, not daring to step out into the cold winter snow.

"I'm playing in the snow," she argued.

"Playing," Polly mocked. "You're four and a half moons! You don't *play* anymore."

"Sure I can," Sunrise argued.

"How are you even standing out in the wind? Isn't it cold?!" Holly wondered.

"Feels fine to me," Sunrise said, realizing she did not feel that cold anymore. In fact, she felt rather warm.

"I told you she's crazy," she heard Polly whisper.

"Hey, I heard that," Sunrise growled.

"What is wrong with you?!" Holly spat at Sunrise.

"What do you mean?" Sunrise asked, padding closer to her sisters.

"You like being out in the cold, you're always so agile, and you can hear us from a distance away? You're a freak!" Holly spat.

"I'm your sister!" Sunrise spat. "You probably could be the same too if you gave it a chance."

"House cats aren't supposed to be like this," Polly told Sunrise. "You're just like those clan cats. Dirty, filthy, animals."

Sunrise unsheathed her claws. "How dare you," she began, only to be cut off by a voice. It was the boy, her owner, standing in the doorway. He looked at the young kit, concerned.

"Sunrise, what are you doing out here?!" he exclaimed. He quickly shoved Holly and Polly aside, a growl escaping from their mouths. Sunrise was about to turn away, not wanting to come back inside, but he had already grabbed hold of her.

"You're freezing and wet," he exclaimed. "We'll dry you off."

As he carried her back into the warm house, Sunrise looked over her shoulder to see Holly and Polly snickering to each other. Sunrise let out a growl, only to feel a soft stroke from her owner.

He set her down on the table and grabbed a towel, beginning to rub it around her. Sunrise did not like the feeling, and she growled, squirming around.

"I know you don't like it," he said, "but you'll be nice and warm when we're done."

Sunrise rolled her eyes as he continued to scrub her body with the towel. When he finished, her fur was sticking up high into the air, and she let out a yowl in surprise.

Her owner laughed, taking a soft brush and combing her fur back down. When he had finished, her pelt looked nice and clean, and it was no longer soaking wet.

"We need to keep you out of the snow," he instructed.

But Sunrise didn't want to stay out of the snow. She had enjoyed it. She loved feeling the wind in her face, the substance in her claws. She felt like a clan cat out there. She felt like a cat that could be free with no limitations. She felt unstoppable.

Sunrise's thoughts were cut off as she felt herself being picked up once again. This time, she was taken to her normal room and sat down in her bed to get some rest. She watched as the boy left, closing the door behind her so she could not escape.

Sunrise sighed, then leapt back up onto the windowsill, watching snow fall. In the distance, she could see the tall trees in the woods. They just barely rose over the rooftops of houses, but they were still there. It was her reminder that there was another world outside of her own, and it was only a few pawsteps away.

Chapter 16

Nothing excited Lifekit more than the first snowfall of leaf-bare. She sat in the nursery with the other kits, watching as the white substance floated down from the sky and settled on the ground, creating a perfect white blanket.

Lifekit had never seen snow before, and it seemed as if this moment was the most special in her life. Sure, she'd heard Mousestripe and her father talk about snow, though they hadn't sounded as amazed as her.

Her mother was in those snowflakes, Lifekit was sure. Just the way they touched the ground so graciously made her think of her mother, dancing in the snowflakes, perhaps. Though Lifekit had never known her, she had heard stories from other cats about how strong and lovable her mother was.

"I wish you'd stayed around," Lifekit would whimper.

"Lifekit, do you want to play?" a familiar mew came.

Lifekit turned, spotting Goosekit behind her. The silver-blue tom let out a smile, his blue eyes sparkling.

Recently, Lifekit had spent her time playing with Goosekit and his siblings, though she tended to play with the tom the most. She wasn't sure why, but she was attracted to him. She supposed she was from the moment she saw him.

"Sure," she purred.

With new playmates, Lifekit didn't spend as much time wandering around the camp looking for her father. Yes, she would go about with Stormnight and Graytail from time to time, and

Mousestripe too, though not as much as she had in the past. Lifekit knew her father was glad she had finally made some friends of her own.

Lifekit followed Goosekit over to where Marshkit and Ripplekit stood. The brother and sister were tossing a mossball back and forth at each other, though their eyes lit up as they saw Lifekit make her way towards them.

"Lifekit's going to play with us!" Ripplekit cheered.

The kits were about four moons younger than Lifekit, though she was careful with them, and they made great playmates. Not being that big herself, she didn't tower over the three kits too much.

Lifekit watched as Marshkit ran up to her, a wide grin on his face. "Did you know our father is going to be leader soon?" he asked, referring to Pinethorn, the deputy.

Lifekit giggled. "I know. But Thornstar just became leader. It'll be awhile before we start calling Pinethorn 'Pinestar.'"

"Oh, ignore their boasting," said Blueocean. She sat in the corner of the den, smiling. "They just want their father to assign them deputy."

"Because I'll be the best deputy ever!" Marshkit shouted.

"Don't be silly," Ripplekit teased. "You know I'll be assigned leader."

"Maybe I will," Lifekit chimed in.

This shut the two up. They turned and looked at Lifekit before bickering again. Lifekit turned to Goosekit who stood laughing.

"What do you want to play?" Lifekit asked.

Goosekit pondered for a moment. "Why not go out into the snow?"

"Absolutely not!" Blueocean shouted.

Lifekit watched as Goosekit shrunk down.

"Don't worry," Lifekit whispered. "Once the storm settles, we can go out. Just remember that."

She watched as Goosekit's frown turned upside down. "Yeah, I guess so," he said, smiling once again.

Lifekit turned, watching as Marshkit and Ripplekit continued to shout at each other. It only took a swat on the ear from Blueocean to shut the two up.

"Why don't we pretend we're warding off MoonClan cats?" Marshkit suggested.

The mention of MoonClan only made Lifekit think of her dead mother. "Oh, well, could it be another group of cats?"

"Oh, that's right," Goosekit said sorrowfully. "Your mother died in the battle. Why don't we be StormClan cats?"

StormClan was a fairly new clan to the forest, not yet being there six moons. The clan seemed to be doing well though, and Thornstar and their leader got along well.

"Fine, I'm a big StormClan cat," Marshkit began. "Ripplekit, you're my deputy."

"Who said you got to be leader?"

"To be fair, you didn't say you were a leader," Goosekit pointed out.

"Fine, I'm leader," Marshkit repeated. "Ripplekit, you're deputy."

"Fine," she grumbled.

"You can be leader if you want," Goosekit offered.

Another thing she loved about Goosekit. His selflessness.

"I've been leader a lot, Goosekit. It's your turn," Lifekit replied.

"Okay, I'm Goosestar, leader of SnowClan!" he yowled. "And this is my deputy, Lifekit."

"You're going down, StormClan!" Lifekit shouted.

"That's what you think," Marshkit laughed. "ATTACK!" He quickly launched himself onto Lifekit, causing her to fall back into the den wall. She laughed, then pawed at the white tom lightly.

"You're outnumbered, Marshstar!"

"We will still win!" Marshkit shouted, continuing to paw at Lifekit. She turned, seeing Goosekit battling his sister. Boy, she didn't want to become an apprentice. All of this would be gone in the blink of an eye.

"We forfeit!" Lifekit heard Goosekit call out weakly.

Ripplekit laughed, jumping off the tom. "ANOTHER VICTORY FOR STORMCLAN!" she yowled.

"Hush up!" Splashleap growled. Lifekit noticed her with her paws over her ears, trying to get some sleep.

"I think it's time for you kits to get some sleep," Blueocean said softly.

"But we haven't taken our dignity back yet," Lifekit argued, glaring at Goosekit. At her glare, he shrunk down.

"Sorry. Ripplekit's really heavy," he whimpered.

"You can take over StormClan tomorrow. Lifekit, your father doesn't want you staying up all night, does he?"

"I guess not," Lifekit sighed, settling down into her cozy nest. While other kits got to sleep next to their mothers, Lifekit had

nothing but vacant space and a small nest. Would her mother sleep next to her and keep her warm? She hoped.

Lifekit slowly closed her eyes, shivering as she felt the leaf-bare breeze enter the den. Slowly, she closed her eyes and drifted off.

When Lifekit awoke, a thick pile of snow lined the entrance of the nursery. The snow had stopped falling, and a bright sun shined up above.

"Wow, look at the snow," she breathed. Apparently, she had spoken too loudly because slowly, cats began to wake up.

Ripplekit bursted by her, shouting, "SNOW! SNOW! Can I play in it, Mommy?"

Blueocean rolled her eyes. "All right," she said.

"Yay!" Ripplekit explained, racing into the snow. The second it touched her paws however, she winced.

"Cold, cold!" she shouted, rushing back in.

"It's not that bad," Lifekit complained, placing her paw into the snow. She had at first doubted herself, but really, it wasn't that bad. The cold sensation only lasted a few seconds before she felt like herself again.

Slowly, she crept out of the den, watching as other cats walked around like the snow was nothing special. Why couldn't they appreciate it like her?

"Come on, guys. Come out here," Lifekit said, issuing the three kits forward. Goosekit was the first to step out. He too winced at the cold sensation, then smiled, heading towards Lifekit.

"Don't be a wimp," Marshkit growled at Ripplekit, padding out into the snow. Ripplekit followed behind him, growling, "I'm not a wimp."

Lifekit looked around, watching as cats pointed and giggled.

"The first snowfall for kits," they would whisper.

Wasn't each snowfall as special as this one? Lifekit wasn't sure.

She raised her head, seeing her father padding by.

"DADDY! DADDY!" she shouted.

He looked up, then padded towards her. "What is it?" he asked.

"Look at the snow!" she exclaimed, jumping around.

Patchfur laughed. "It's amazing how much you're like your mother. The first snow is always the most special."

Finally, someone understood.

Patchfur smiled, then padded off, leaving her alone to play with her friends.

"I wish my dad would visit us that often," Marshkit whimpered.

"Pinethorn is deputy, and that's a big responsibility," Lifekit explained. "My dad doesn't visit me that much either, but don't worry, parents play a big part in your life. Imagine when you're an apprentice or warrior and you go on patrols with him. Wouldn't that be fun?"

Ripplekit smiled. "Yes, with Blueocean too! And you three," she said, pointing to the kits.

Lifekit smiled, glad she had cheered them up. "I'll be an apprentice soon though," she sighed.

Goosekit frowned, then touched his paw to hers. "It's okay. We'll still be able to train together, even if it's not for that long."

"Of course," Lifekit said. "Because you three are my best friends, and I wouldn't trade you all for anything else in the world."

Lifekit bit her lip after the words escaped her mouth. She truly loved her friends, but if she had the chance to bring her mother back, would she give them up?

No, it was stupid to need something you had never had in the first place. Her friends would stay in her life, and she was positive her mother would not enter her life. But like her father had said, her mother lived inside her, as did all of StarClan. She knew her mother was only up in the stars with the other cats...

Chapter 17

Salmon lazily opened her eyes and yawned, padding out of the birthing den. In only a few days, she would be six months old, and then, she'd begin training. She'd have to pass the test and all, though she sort of just assumed she would. Then, her father would declare her the next leader.

He had to, right? She was his only kin.

Salmon padded by, sitting down next to Mouse and Honey. They were becoming fine hunters and fighters, and she hoped to train as well as them.

"Morning," Mouse mewed.

"We can't wait for you to train with us soon!" Honey squeaked. "It'll be so exciting!"

"What makes you think she'll pass initiation?" a familiar voice came.

Salmon growled and turned, spotting Storm standing in the corner.

"She's the leader's daughter. Of course she'll pass," Mouse explained.

"Yeah," Salmon agreed. "I'll catch the biggest piece of prey within minutes."

"Oh, yeah right," Storm remarked. "You may have the title of 'future leader', but that doesn't mean you're better than everyone. In fact, Oak hasn't even confirmed you are the future ruler."

Salmon's heart sunk, but she still tried to remain strong. "Yeah, what makes you think he'll choose you over me?"

"What are you talking about?" Storm growled.

"It's obvious, isn't it?" Salmon said, taking a step closer to face him. "You're only bashing on me because *you* want to be leader. Have you forgotten there are plenty of other cats here? The world doesn't revolve around you."

"Uh, guys," Mouse squeaked.

"How dare you!" Storm spat. "I'm only trying to be the best cat I can be! You have your life worked out for you! In fact, I'd say your life is perfect! No matter how long it takes you to catch prey, even if you give up, Oak can't send his only daughter away. You'll be leader, only because you're his kin!"

"My life isn't perfect!" Salmon hissed, digging her claws into the dirt. "Have you forgotten my mother died when I was a young kit? Do you know how much it hurts to want her every day? My father is busy caring for the rogue pack to pay attention to me!

"And as for the kin issue, that's how it works, you dimwitted tom! The kin rules! Not just any old cat the leader comes across."

"But don't you need a mate?" Storm asked. "I don't think cats just rule by themselves."

"Why do you even care?" Salmon froze. "Ha, no. What makes you think I'd choose you as a mate?"

"What other toms are in this pack?"

"How about over there?" Salmon asked, pointing to toms training, others eating prey. "You're just hungry for power, Storm!"

"WILL YOU TWO SHUT UP?!" Honey screamed at last. "Come on, we've got training to do. You too, Storm."

Storm shot a glare at Salmon before running off.

"Stupid tom," she spat as he walked away. She'd show him she'd be a good hunter and fighter and still be a good leader. That would show him.

"Salmon, what is going on?!" a familiar voice came.

Salmon turned, seeing her father running to her, a look of disapproval on his face.

"Storm's being a pain," she explained.

"Quit picking fights with your fellow members," Oak told her. "You're not even in training yet."

"He started it," Salmon explained. "He started saying rotten things about me."

"Just ignore the tom."

"Father, I start training soon, right?"

"In three days, to be exact," Oak told her. "Why do you ask?"

"Even if I quit, would you send me out of the pack?"

"Why would you purposely fail initiation? You've got good blood in you, Salmon. You'll do fine," Oak reassured her.

"Who's training me if I do pass?"

"Me," Oak told her. "It's tradition the male leader trains his kin, the future leader."

"But am I the future ruler?" Salmon asked.

"It all depends on your training. As far as I know, you will be the future ruler. You're my only kin."

Salmon sighed. "All right. Thanks for the information."

Oak padded off, leaving Salmon to sit alone in the camp. Sighing, she went off into the snowy woods towards the place where her mother was buried.

The cherry blossom tree was bare and cold, like always. But soon, it would be spring, and then, the blossoms would form and she could speak to her mother.

Salmon sat down next to the tree, sighing.

"Mother," she began. "I know you can't hear me, as it's not yet spring, and the cherry blossoms haven't even begun to grow, but...all I ask for is your help. Give me guidance, please. Help me to be the best cat I can be.

"I want to prove Storm and Oak and the entire pack that I'm not just going to be ruler because I am Oak's kin, but because I am a good fighter. That's really all I ask. Please help me out with my initiation in the past three days. And thank you for all you've done for me."

She sat next to the tree for awhile, letting tears fall silently. She curled up next to the tree, snow gently floating down onto her white and gold pelt. Did her mother ever feel like this?

No, she couldn't have. After all, she was only Oak's mate and that was how she became a ruler. She didn't grow up knowing that she'd take leadership later in life. It must've just happened for her.

Salmon knew it was an odd thought, but most of the time she felt she didn't belong in the rogue pack. She felt like an outcast, someone only there for show. Ever since her mother died she had felt this way.

Her father was not cruel or abusive, but he wasn't the best father either. She knew he was busy, but not once had he made his love known to her, not once had he let her curl up next to him, like her soft-hearted mother.

And after initiation, she'd be training with him each day. She could only imagine how terrifying that would be. For six months they'd be training together, for six months he'd scream at her and tell her to do better, and for what? Would she even be leader at the end?

The thought about a mate sickened her, but she guessed it would happen eventually. There were plenty of good toms in the pack. She guessed she just would ignore all of it for now.

Sighing, she picked herself up and shook off her snow-

covered pelt, padding back to the pack.

Chapter 18

"Lemonkit, Lemonkit," a squeaky voice came.

Lemonkit groaned as two small paws pushed against her side. She rolled over, only to fill more paws touch her side.

"What?!" she growled.

She opened her eyes, seeing Troutkit standing next to her, her gray eyes gazing into Lemonkit's.

"Are we going to play?" she asked, tilting her head.

Lemonkit rose to her feet, shaking off her pelt. She towered over the little she-cat, and she was almost scared to play with the kits now, afraid she might trample them.

She was nearly six moons. Very soon, she'd be an apprentice of NightClan, fighting battles and assisting the clan! And the best part was that she'd be made an apprentice with her friends.

She had to admit, she would be sad leaving Frostflight and the kits in the nursery, but then she could go on patrols with Hailfrost, and soon, her "siblings"!

"We play a lot," Lemonkit sighed.

"But Mother says you'll be an apprentice soon and leave us in the nursery! Is that true?" Troutkit asked. Her gray eyes flickered with sorrow.

"Oh," Lemonkit said quietly, looking down at her speckled paws. She looked back up at Troutkit, hoping her sorrow had vanished. Unfortunately, it hadn't.

"Well, yes, I'll be an apprentice soon, and I will leave the nursery...But that doesn't mean I'll be gone forever! I'll still visit, of course, and soon enough, you'll join me with training!"

"Being a warrior seems fun!" Desertpaw chimed in.

"Well, we'll see how it is. I can't wait to start training!" Lemonkit purred.

"I remember when I was an apprentice," Frostflight giggled, overhearing their conversation. Lemonkit turned her attention to her mother, hoping for a story.

"It's weird thinking of you as an apprentice," Lemonkit admitted.

The gray she-cat smiled. "Well, I was, and so was Hailfrost! Ah, those were the good days...before we had little kits to worry about," she joked.

"Did Hailfrost have a brother?" Lemonkit asked.

Frostflight nodded. "Yes, but he left to another clan as a young kit. Winterfrost, one of our elders, was heartbroken. But she had a second litter, of course. Still, the family doesn't talk about it."

"Why did he leave?" Desertkit asked.

"Hailfrost claims he felt that he didn't fit in. But I don't know why. He was a normal NightClan cat with a loving family," Frostflight explained. "But hush! I don't want you talking about it!"

Lemonkit nodded.

"What cats are Winterfrost's second litter?" Spotkit asked, confused.

"Leafpaw, Arcticpaw, and Shellpaw."

"Oh, Arcticpaw!" Lemonkit exclaimed. "Mangokit plays with him!"

Frostflight nodded. "Good kits, all of them. Go run off and play now! Your mother needs sleep!"

"So do I," Lemonkit grumbled.

"What should we play, Lemonkit?" Pearkit asked.

Lemonkit sighed. Would the four ever give her a break?

Before she could open her mouth, however, there was a tap on her shoulder, and she turned, seeing Thymekit.

"Hey!" she said, smiling.

He waved his tail back at her, his eyes gleaming with joy.

She always hoped his voice would return, but it hadn't, and by now, every cat had not expected it too. They were beginning to accept that Thymekit would be mute forever.

Raspberrykit came up behind him, a grin on her face.

"Are you excited to become an apprentice?"

Lemonkit nodded. "I can't wait!" she exclaimed.

Behind her, the four kits pouted.

Thymekit pointed his tail behind her shoulder, and she winced, turning to face the four kits.

"Is is true? Do you want to leave us?" Pearkit asked.

"No, never," Lemonkit purred.

"But you just talked about how excited you were!" Desertkit cried out. "Do you not care about us?!"

Lemonkit sighed, turning to face her friends. "I'll catch up with you two later. We," she turned her head to look at the kits, "need to have a talk."

Thymekit nodded, padding off with Raspberrykit into the camp. Lemonkit took the kits outside by the entrance of the den, sitting down against it.

"Sit," she instructed.

The four did as they were told, sitting beside Lemonkit. Each of them looked depressed and sorrowful, not jovial and full of energy like their normal selves.

"You are all going through something most cats don't go through," she admitted. "I mean, usually siblings all become apprentices together. Sometimes, friends join their friends in a moon. But everything is different with us.

"I know I'm not your real sister, but that doesn't mean I can't act like one. But look you four, you'll be apprentices in no time, and you'll join me in training! You can sleep right next to me, and in the morning, we can share prey! Maybe we'll train together!"

The four looked around excitedly at this idea.

"Leaving you will be hard, and three moons is a long time to wait, but it's important to take in your kithood and make friends! You make some great friends in the nursery; I know I have."

"Will you miss us?" Troutkit asked.

"Of course!" Lemonkit exclaimed. "And don't ever pretend like I don't!"

"Will you learn how to battle all sorts of evil cats?" Pearkit asked.

"You bet!" Lemonkit purred. "And I'll tell you all about it! You have to keep Frostflight company too though. She might get a bit lonely without me around," she joked.

"We will," Spotkit purred.

"Good. Everything settled then?"

Slowly, the four nodded.

"Good," Lemonkit purred. "I love you guys. Don't forgot it!"

The four kits giggled then ran off into the nursery towards their mother. Smiling, Lemonkit found Thymekit and Raspberrykit

sitting against the den wall.

"Everything going well?" Raspberrykit asked.

"Fine. The kits just didn't want me to leave, that's all," Lemonkit explained.

"You're lucky you're older than them. I'd want three moons away from Windkit and Koikit."

"Stop that. They're your siblings. You should be glad you have some," Lemonkit growled.

"You technically have some too. Don't they annoy you?"

"No, they're so sweet," she purred.

"Lucky you," Raspberrykit grumbled. "So, do you know who your mentor will be?"

Both Lemonkit and Thymekit shrugged.

"I hope mine is awesome."

"Me too," Lemonkit said, imaging her mentor now. She couldn't put a face on the cat, but it'd obviously be a strong cat, a she-cat perhaps, with a soft voice and great teaching skills.

"Lemonkit."

"What?" she asked, breaking free from her daydream.

"Frostflight was calling you," Raspberrykit announced, pointing her tail to the nursery entrance.

"Oh, thanks," Lemonkit said. "I'll talk to you guys later! Bye!"

Thymekit smiled, waving as Lemonkit rushed into the nursery. Frostflight sat with the four kits, smiling.

"You called me here?"

"Just checking where you were. Why don't you rest?"

"But I haven't been up that long!" Lemonkit argued.

"You have a big day tomorrow. Get some sleep," Frostflight purred.

"Oh, all right," she growled, laying down in her nest. Lemonkit couldn't find herself to sleep though. She'd close her eyes, only anticipating what would happen tomorrow when she became an apprentice.

Who would be her mentor? What would she learn? How big was the forest? There were too many questions to ask!

"Come soon," she whispered, gazing into the blue sky.

Chapter 19

Sunrise lazily opened her eyes, finding yet another cold winter day. Life in her home had been boring, not too exciting. Her owners would let her go out regularly now, and the boy who cared for her was kind as usual, but she had a craving for adventure. She wanted to learn more about these clan cats, who they were, how they lived their life.

She had not heard anything from Cracker since she asked him about them, but she would sometimes sit on the fence and see the woods in the distance, wondering if there were cats nearby.

How would you summon a clan cat? Would you yowl? Shout?

Going into the forest was not an option. Though it would be the easiest way to meet a clan cat, she still believed it would be safer to remain in her house. She still wanted to learn their ways...

Holly and Polly ignored her most of the time, whispering about her secret craving to be a clan cat. She would argue with them, telling them it wasn't true and a kittypet was her life, but oh, all she wanted to be was a clan cat, racing through those woods, leaping from tree to tree.

Sunrise stretched her legs, padding out of the boy's room into the kitchen. Holly and Polly sat on the girls' laps as they watched morning television, leaving Sunrise to eat breakfast in peace.

She came to her silver bowl, munching on the cat food. Outside the sun glinted on the fresh snow, and she purred, deciding she'd take a trip out there later in the day after her breakfast.

Finishing off her meal with some water, Sunrise padded near Holly and Polly, leaping onto the blue couch the others sat on.

"Ew," one of the girls, Holly's owner, said. She called the boy's name, though it was hard to hear as she shrieked. "Get your cat away!"

Polly laughed at Sunrise. "Freak," she whispered. "Even the owners don't like you."

Sunrise growled, leaping at Polly. Polly immediately began to yowl and whimper as Sunrise hissed at her, pawing at her pelt.

One of the girls screamed, and Sunrise felt hands wrap around her body. They pried her off of Polly, when suddenly, Sunrise felt the familiar gentle hands of the boy.

"What's going on?!" he exclaimed.

The girl glared at him. "Your cat attacked Polly! Get that thing away!"

"Attacked? Sunrise wouldn't hurt a fly," he argued.

"I watched her do it," the girl argued.

The boy walked away, taking Sunrise to his room. He sat her down on his bed and sighed. The look of disapproval made Sunrise want to curl up into a ball and hide.

"I don't know if what they said is true, but, you're a good girl, Sunrise. You wouldn't hurt your sisters or anyone," he said, scratching her behind the ear.

Sunrise purred, laying down on his soft bed. He laughed, stroking his fingers through her pelt.

"It's best you stay here the rest of the day. Don't want any more accidents happening," he said.

He quietly got off of the bed and shut the door, trapping Sunrise inside of his room. Sunrise groaned, sitting up. She didn't want to stay inside forever. She wanted to explore the backyard and play in the snow!

Sunrise leapt down from the bed and sat on the boy's windowsill, watching as cars zoomed by on the road.

"I can't be in here forever," she complained, dropping down onto the tile floor. She had never tried opening a door, but she supposed she'd have enough time to experiment before the boy came back in.

She padded towards the white door, taking a deep breath in. She imagined herself as a clan cat, leaping up to catch a bird in the air.

She leapt up, swiping the golden doorknob with her paw. It turned a little, but did nothing significant.

She sighed, continuing to try. After a few more tries, she tried hitting the door with more force, and she was surprised to hear the creak of the door. It had opened!

Grinning, she slowly opened the door, slipping through. Holly and Polly were most likely tucked away in their rooms, though it was never a bad idea to be careful. She crawled underneath the sofa, hearing nothing but the quiet sound of the

heater blasting.

Seeing no feet, she darted across the room, hiding in the blinds of the sliding glass door. The room was empty, leaving her to easily slip out the cat door into the backyard.

The backyard was empty, like it normally was. Snow coated the entire backyard, including the table and chairs. She made her way farther into the backyard, wondering if she should practice more fighting moves or maybe hunting skills.

Did clan cats practice in the snow? She was sure they did.

Sunrise sunk her claws into the tree, beginning to climb up it. By now, she was able to climb a slippery tree in less than a minute. That meant when the snow melted and spring came, she'd be able to climb that tree in about ten seconds! Just the thought made her smile.

Clumps of snow fell from the tree as she climbed higher up the tree. Once she reached the top, she smiled, overlooking the neighborhood. She could see the other backyards, also covered in snow. A few children played in their backyard while most were vacant.

Sunrise leaned against the trunk, watching the trees blow in the wind. The forest stood beyond the neighborhood, as if it were going to swallow all civilization up. It was large, looking as if it went on for miles and miles.

"Maybe I'll live there one day," Sunrise whispered.

She sat there awhile longer, watching the woods sway back and forth in the wind. Suddenly, something caught her attention. Walking along the fence was a light brown tabby she-cat, around Sunrise's age. It was a cat Sunrise had never seem before, though still, she wondered if perhaps it were a clan cat.

The she-cat slipped into the backyard to the right of Sunrise's house. Pricking her ears, Sunrise leapt down from the tall tree, padding to the other side of her frozen fence. She leapt onto it, noticing the she-cat sitting on the porch of her home, licking her paws.

"Hello!" Sunrise called.

The she-cat jumped about five inches as she heard Sunrise's voice. She turned, looking at Sunrise, wide-eyed. She slowly calmed down.

"Oh, I didn't notice you there," the she-cat explained.

"I'm pretty silent on my feet," Sunrise admitted. "Mind if I

come into your backyard?"

"Oh, not at all," the she-cat said, watching as Sunrise leapt down from her fence into the she-cat's backyard.

"I don't recognize you. Are you new here?" Sunrise asked.

"My owners moved here only a few days ago," the she-cat explained. "I guess I should properly introduce myself. I'm Fawn."

"Sunrise," she said, smiling. "How old are you?"

"Almost six moons," Fawn told her.

"Same as me!" Sunrise purred. "I've been living her for awhile. My sisters live with me too."

"How nice!"

Sunrise laughed. "I'm sorry. I should've kept explaining. My sisters are pests. I never liked them, and now I have to spend the rest of my life with them."

"Oh, well, be thankful your family is staying with you," Fawn sighed. "I had to leave my family when I was younger, and now, I'm so confused."

"I understand. I miss my old siblings."

Fawn didn't respond, only looked down at her paws.

Trying to break the tension, Sunrise began to speak again. "I thought you were some forest cat when I saw you walking along the fence. Have you heard about forest cats? Or clan cats I should say?"

Fawn's eyes widened. "Clan cats?"

"You know, cats that live in the forest."

Fawn nodded slowly. "Y-Yes, I've heard of them. Not that I want to."

"Has Cracker been telling you stories too?"

"Who?"

"Some annoying tom," Sunrise explained. "Told me how vicious clan cats were. But I'm curious about them. Maybe they're really sweet."

"Perhaps," Fawn said, staring off into the distance. "If-If I told you something, would you think I was crazy?"

"Tell me anything!" Sunrise exclaimed. "I'm sure I can handle it."

"I-I've been having dreams lately, and I'm not sure what they mean. There's this mention of a place called StarClan, and clan cats, and I'm not sure why. They visit me in my dreams, Sunrise, the clan cats."

"What?"

"I knew you wouldn't believe me," Fawn sighed.

"No, I do!" Sunrise assured her. "I've heard of StarClan. It's where the dead clan cats go, or so I've heard, but I never thought they were real. Why would they visit you?"

Fawn shrugged. "I'm no clan cat, just a simple kittypet."

"Who visits you?"

"I don't know that either. Cats come and go, smile at me. I hear about things going on in the clans. It's all confusing."

"Interesting. What do you see? What are clan cats like?"

"I can't tell you. I mean, I could, but I don't know what they're doing. I don't understand any of it!" Fawn cried out. Sunrise stepped back as she began to sob. "I'm a wreck! I wonder if I'm crazy!"

"No, no, you're sane," Sunrise told her. "Maybe you need to visit the clan cats, ask them about these dreams."

"Oh, no. No," Fawn told her. "They are vicious. I've seen visions of cats in battle, their paws drenched in blood. No, I'm fine here."

"But you'll never figure this out!"

"No offense, but I've only just met you, Sunrise. You're a very sweet she-cat, but you're no clan cat."

"But you don't understand, Fawn! I want to know everything about clan cats! There's so much to know!"

"If only the cats came to you and not me. I don't know what they're asking me or what they want."

"When did the dreams start?"

"When I was a young kit. I don't remember them too well, but they've grown over time. When I was younger, I would see unknown cats, nothing big. But now they speak to me, I see battles, I see kits playing in their homes. I don't understand it!"

Sunrise frowned. "I wish I could help. But my advice still stands. It won't hurt to visit the clan cats."

Fawn sighed. "Maybe one day. But right now, I'm not brave enough to venture into those woods."

Sunrise sighed. "Well, I've got to go, but I hope you figure everything out, Fawn. Maybe we could meet tomorrow? Just play, like kits."

Fawn smiled a little at this. "Sure, we can play."

"Great," Sunrise purred, leaping over the fence. Had she just met a cat who could contact StarClan?

Chapter 20

Lifekit groaned as paws swept at her tail in the early morning. It was too early to play, but she knew Blueocean's kits were already up, waiting to play.

"Lifekit," a whisper came.

"For the love of StarClan, hush up!" she shouted, burying her head into her paws. The voice was feminine though, and for a moment, she wondered...No, it couldn't have been her mother's voice.

Lifekit opened her eyes and turned, only seeing the three kits sitting by her side. It hadn't been her mother. She was a mouse-brain for thinking so.

"Finally, you're awake!" Ripplekit squeaked.

"I've been awake for awhile with you three pulling at my tail," Lifekit sighed, standing up. She towered over the kits, and in a few days, she would be leaving them to become an apprentice. The thought made her smile, but she would miss the playtime with Blueocean's three kits.

"Head outside," Blueocean snapped. She was curled up in a ball, trying to sleep. Lifekit led the kits outside into the snowy camp.

In a moon or so, the snow would eventually fade, and prey would be plentiful again, or so she had heard. Lifekit had never experienced a new-leaf or green-leaf before, and she assumed her first seasons would be wonderful, just like leaf-fall and leaf-bare.

"Are you going to be a warrior soon?" Marshkit asked.

Lifekit giggled. "I'm going to be an apprentice training to be a warrior, but soon I'll be one."

"Daddy is deputy!" Ripplekit boasted.

"Ripplekit, Blueocean said you're not supposed to yell that to cats!" Goosekit scolded.

Lifekit smiled. "Well, your father definitely deserved that position," she told them. She gazed at the kits, looking closely. They really didn't look too much like their father. Of course, Pinethorn did have bits of white in his pelt. Perhaps that's where Marshkit had gotten his white pelt. As for the others, their fur resembled Blueocean's, though Ripplekit's pelt was tabby, unlike Goosekit's.

"It's a shame none of you resemble Pinethorn too much," Lifekit pointed out. To be honest though, Pinethorn's pelt was a mucky color, nothing too appealing.

"You don't look like your father," Goosekit pointed out.

"I've got the white," Lifekit explained. "Everyone says I look just like my mother. But I don't understand why they make a big deal out of it. Yeah, Shinypelt died in battle, but so did other warriors."

Ripplekit shrugged at Lifekit. "Maybe she was close to a lot of cats."

"Maybe," Lifekit reiterated, though she doubted that was the true case.

"Who's going to be your mentor?" Marshkit asked as he bounced alongside Lifekit.

"I don't know," Lifekit admitted. "But I'm sure Thornstar will assign me someone great!"

"I want Pinethorn to be my mentor," Goosekit explained.

"Your kin can't be a mentor," Ripplekit told him.

"Thornstar will give you three someone great too," Lifekit assured the three.

"Good. I want to be leader!" Marshkit declared.

Ripplekit looked down at her paws uneasily, as if she were going to be sick.

"You all right, Ripplekit?" Goosekit tapped his sister.

"I-I know Spiritheart is the new medicine cat," Ripplekit spoke softly.

The former medicine cat, Sandheart, retired less than a moon prior.

The position was open for a new medicine cat apprentice, though Lifekit had guessed no cat would take up Spiritheart as a mentor for awhile.

"I sometimes watch him work," Ripplekit admitted.

Lifekit came back to the present and turned, facing Ripplekit.

"What?"

"You know. Those times when Blueocean makes me leave the den to get some air, I head over to the medicine cat den," Ripplekit explained. "I usually watch from a distance as Spiritheart tends to the cats."

"Why watch a boring old medicine cat?" Marshkit complained.

"I-I want to be a medicine cat," Ripplekit said quietly.

Lifekit's ears pricked. "Is that true, Ripplekit?" She slowly felt her heart sinking. She wanted to encourage Ripplekit to go live her dream, but at the same time, she didn't want to train without her friend.

Ripplekit nodded slowly.

"Giving up a warrior life to tend to cats?" Marshkit asked.

"Why?"

"It's just something I want to do!" Ripplekit snapped.

"Leave her be, Marshkit. She's only three moons!"

"Almost four," Ripplekit argued.

"She still has lots of time to think," Lifekit argued, but in her heart, she was secretly praying Ripplekit decided to leave behind the whole medicine cat idea.

The four remained silent for a few seconds before Goosekit eventually sat down. The others sat down beside him, watching as cats went by.

"I heard Springpaw caught her first piece of prey the other day," Marshkit said as the dark brown tabby she-cat padded by. She and her siblings had recently become apprentices, and to be honest, Lifekit was relieved they had left the nursery.

"That's ridiculous! She's been an apprentice for over a moon!" Goosekit snapped.

"That's just what I heard," Marshkit replied.

"Is it true they're half-MoonClan?" Ripplekit asked quietly.

Lifekit nodded slowly, remembering as a young kit when her father had lectured her on not judging her clanmates by their background. It was hard to though. Tasha was a former kittypet who became mates with a MoonClan tom, and their kits didn't even possess any SnowClan blood. Just MoonClan and kittypet. Though, as she thought about it, the kittypet blood didn't seem as bad as the MoonClan blood.

"Why are they even in this clan?" Marshkit whispered. "Only SnowClan cats should be in this clan."

"Tasha is a SnowClan member," Goosekit explained.

"But she *was* a kittypet."

"Why does it matter?"

"It just does."

Lifekit tried to ignore their arguments, but she too felt the same with Marshkit. They didn't belong in the clan and neither did their mother, even if she was a SnowClan member.

"Cloudstar just wasn't a good judge of cats," Marshkit continued to rant.

"Shush!" Lifekit spoke at last.

"What?" Marshkit asked.

Lifekit spotted her father in the crowd and turned to face the three. "I see my dad. I'll catch up with you three later."

"Bye, Lifekit," Ripplekit waved as Lifekit ran off. She ran to her father's side, watching as he padded by the warriors den.

He turned, facing her. A small smile lit up on his face.

"Hey!"

"Hi!" Lifekit squeaked. She had grown closer to her father, though many times he did turn down with playing with her. She had new friends now, and he claimed it was better for her if she stick with her friends instead of playing with her father. She knew Graytail and Stormnight still kept an eye on her, but even Mousestripe didn't visit as often. Maybe once every few sunrises.

"Are you excited to become an apprentice soon?" Patchfur asked awkwardly, as if he were trying to make up some conversation.

Lifekit nodded. "Yeah, it'll be great! Do you think Shinypelt will attend my ceremony?"

"Shinypelt is dead," Patchfur replied with no emotion.

"I mean in spirit," Lifekit continued. "StarClan cats watch

ceremonies, don't they?"

Patchfur shrugged. "Maybe."

"Shinypelt is a StarClan cat, right?" Lifekit asked.

Patchfur hesitated for a moment, then nodded. "Yes, Lifekit. She gave her life for the clan. Of course she's in StarClan."

"Are those other cats who died in battle in StarClan too."

"Every cat who died fighting for their clan is in StarClan," Patchfur repeated.

"Well, why does Shinypelt get all the credit? How is she more special than the other cats who died?"

"What?"

Lifekit sighed. Her father never understood her.

"I mean, why do cats always talk about her dying in battle more than the others?"

Patchfur frowned. "I've got a patrol now, sweetie, but go run off with your friends. I'll get Mousestripe to share a squirrel with you later, okay?"

"But—" Lifekit began, sighing as her father padded off. Why had he avoided her question? She guessed it didn't matter. It seemed like all her questions about her mother were stupid.

She didn't even know that much about her mother. She knew she looked like her, she knew she died in battle, she knew she was a bit popular among the cats, but no cat ever talked about her too much. She never heard stories about her mother's kithood, and not so much about Stormnight and Graytail's either.

Lifekit never commented on their pieces of missing fur. Once, she had asked her father, and he had told her not to ask about it. She had continued though, and finally, he spoke of a fire that had burned off their fur. Lifekit another time had asked why

their pelts did not resemble Mousestripe's or their father's that she sometimes heard about, but Patchfur would just shake his head and pad off.

Sometimes, Lifekit would hear others whisper "Moonstar" when they walked by, but she was unsure why. The clan definitely treated them differently, though she didn't understand what some pieces of missing fur from a fire had to do with anything.

Lifekit sighed and padded back into the nursery, deciding to let go of the questions and just focus on her future.

Chapter 21

Salmon awoke with excitement, her paws tingling. As she glanced around the old nursing den, she knew today was her last day in this den. Today, she'd be going on her hunt in order to train as a hunter and fighter. If she succeeded, she would be leader. She knew she could.

The sun was just beginning to rise above the horizon, golden lights shining on the clearing where the other cats rested. Salmon quickly stretched, padding outside of the small den. Her mother would guide her, she was sure of that.

Salmon had been visiting the cherry blossom tree for awhile, hoping soon that it would bloom. For now though, it was bare and coated in snow. In the spring, she'd be able to speak to her mother. When those cherry blossoms bloomed, Salmon would see only her mother.

Today, she knew Cherry Blossom would be with her. Salmon promised to catch the biggest piece of prey in the woods. Then, she'd take that to her father. That would show him that she was leader material.

As she padded outside, she watched as Storm padded by, glaring at her.

"What's the matter, Storm? Jealous I'm going on my hunt today?" Salmon snapped.

The gray tom froze and turned towards her. "Jealous?" he laughed. "Never. It'll be incredibly hard to find prey in this weather," he said, his paws sinking in a fresh layer of snow. "My sisters and I had to hunt in the fall, when prey was still plentiful. As for you, you're lucky if you find a mouse."

Salmon growled at the tom. "I'll prove to you I can find prey

in this weather! When I come back with a plump squirrel, everyone will see I'm leader material."

"I hope you don't freeze to death first," he laughed. "You're practically doomed."

"Run back to your stupid den!" Salmon hissed.

A tail on Salmon's shoulder made her jump. She turned, noticing her father. He stood in the sunlight, his dark brown pelt standing out in the white snow.

"Are you ready?" he asked.

"Yes, Father," she explained, glaring at Storm as she walked away. She padded with her father towards the center of the clearing. The other cats gathered excitedly, awaiting Oak's announcement.

The tom stood tall and proud, and Salmon supposed she should take a few tips from him. She held out her chest and stood tall as well, causing some of the other cats to laugh.

"Now, now!" Oak called, waiting for the cats to quiet down. When their voices were no longer audible, he began to speak.

"As you know, my daughter has reached six months today, which means she is eligible to train as one of us. But first, Salmon must prove herself in a test of strength and intelligence. To prove that she is tribe material, she must first catch a piece of prey and bring it back to us. If she returns successfully, she'll be able to train. If not, she will be exiled."

"Salmon," Oak said, now turning to his daughter. "Do you accept this challenge?"

"Yes, Father, I do," she replied.

"Then, I command you to go into the woods and bring the first piece of prey you find!" he shouted.

Salmon nodded, glancing back at the cats one last time. She

took a deep breath in as she faced the snowy woods. She could do this. She *would* do this. For her mother.

As she gathered enough strength and self-esteem, she burst into the woods, the cats vanishing behind her. Salmon ran for awhile, past snowy rocks and trees, past bushes and frozen ponds. When she felt she was far enough from the clearing. She stopped, catching her breath in the icy weather.

Already, she felt cold from the winter winds that brushed against her. Parts of her pelt were clumped with snow, but she had to do this. She had to find a piece of prey in this terrible weather.

As she walked, however, she caught no scents of any animals. All she could smell was the winter wind that blew against her.

Maybe Storm was right. Maybe she wasn't good enough. It would be impossible to find any sort of prey in these woods.

"No, I have to try," Salmon argued. "My mother wouldn't have given up."

Salmon padded through the woods, feeling more hopeless with each corner she turned and with each boulder she passed.

"I have to try," she argued, snow blowing against her pelt. It was impossible to find any sort of prey in this weather, especially with a winter storm on the way. Salmon continued trudging through the snow though, knowing that she had to find a way to collect a piece of prey. If she didn't, she'd fail, and she'd be alone in the woods forever.

Salmon froze, hearing the sound of a snapped twig. She turned around, hoping to find a rabbit or even a small mouse. Her heart sunk. An icicle had dropped from a nearby plant onto a rock, and bits of ice spread across the ground. It had been nothing but the wind that has caused the icicle to fall.

Sighing, Salmon continued on, the snow coming down harder now. Soon enough, the snow began to blind her, and she

realized she had to take shelter somewhere. It was impossible to find anything in this weather. All the animals were most likely taking shelter in small holes or caves.

Tired, exhausted, Salmon made her way through the woods, her pelt chilly. She hadn't been in this part of the woods too often, so it was all unfamiliar to her. She wasn't sure which way she had come or where to go. She was about to cry out in anguish, then shut her mouth, knowing she had to move on.

Up ahead, she thought she saw a large boulder, but as she came closer, she realized that there was a dark center that stood out from the rest of the sides. It was a cave!

Salmon sighed in relief, thanking her mother for leading her to some place to rest. Quickly, Salmon padded towards the cave, collapsing on the cold, stone ground. Outside, the wind howled and snow came down quickly.

Salmon turned, glancing at the cave. She wondered if maybe any animals were in here. She doubted it.

Salmon sat up against the wall of the cave, shuffling her paws. It would be impossible to go hunting again until the storm calmed down. How long would it last? She wasn't sure. All she knew was that it needed to end soon if she wanted to impress the others. She had hoped she'd find prey by the evening, though now, she highly doubted it. She guessed this storm would be going on for awhile.

Salmon curled up in the cave, her tail resting on her nose. She closed her eyes, slowly drifting off into a sleep.

Visions haunted Salmon as she slept. She saw cats gathered in a clearing, yowling and arguing with each other, followed by others padding through the woods, on hunts of their own. At one point, she swore she saw her mother leading her down a rocky path, though she doubted it was actually Cherry Blossom. The dream ended with Salmon standing in the woods as a hawk screeched up above.

Salmon awoke panting, finding that the cave was absolutely silent. Outside, no snow fell, and the forest seemed calm. All she could hear was water dropping onto the cave floor.

Salmon stood up, seeing that the sun had not fully risen yet. Had she slept through the afternoon and night? She guessed so, seeing as it was the next day now. She guessed the cats had given up on her by now.

Sore and hungry, Salmon looked around the woods, watching as snow glistened in the sunlight.

"I've got to keep going," she muttered, padding through the snow. She exited the cave, though she memorized the landmarks near her in case she would have to return later. She made her way through the woods, hoping to see some sort of prey. So far, she'd seen absolutely nothing besides snails that had clung to plants. Other than that, it was hopeless.

Salmon began to pad up a large hill, struggling as snow kept her from taking more steps. She continued though, knowing her mother would've been able to walk up the hill. Her mother had to be the best at everything, no doubt.

As Salmon reached the top of the hill, she collapsed and panted heavily, snow soaking up her pelt. She felt the cold substance flow through her, though she ignored it and stood back up, finding only a sole tree standing on top of a hill with some bushes scattered around.

Curious, Salmon looked around. From here, she could see some of the forest, though in the distance, she could see mountains. She wondered if the view was beautiful up in the mountains. Maybe cats could see the entire forest there and point out every nook and cranny. Just the thought made her smile.

Salmon sat against the tree, looking down at her paws. If she couldn't find any more prey by tonight, she'd be a failure, and she'd have to return with nothing. Then, she'd never become leader and would be forced to become an exile all her life. She'd probably starve to death in a day. She was already starving right now.

"If I catch prey, I'll be fed," Salmon reminded herself, gazing around. The sun shined brightly, allowing her to have clear vision, but nothing moved.

Salmon moaned, shaking snow off her pelt. As she licked her paw, she gasped as a shadow moved up ahead. Curious, Salmon moved forward, jumping as she heard the cry of a bird.

Salmon looked up, noticing a large brown hawk. Its wings were spread wide, and it circled around the hill where Salmon stood.

Immediately, Salmon began to shake. Though it was usually only kits scared of hawks, Salmon was still small, and it could pick her up easily.

The hawk, its eye focused on Salmon, soared down towards the ground. Salmon shrieked and leapt to the side, the hawk missing it. Salmon gasped to see how sharp its talons were as it moved away.

Salmon began edging towards the tree, sinking her claws into the bark as she attempted to climb. The tree was icy though, and there were no branches near enough to the ground for her to grab onto.

The hawk cried again and moved towards her, grasping her tail. Salmon gasped and slashed at its beak, causing the hawk to release her.

Gasping for breath, Salmon knew that if she tried to run down the hill now, she'd stumble into the snow, and then she'd be easy prey for the hawk. No, she had to be prepared for the hawk's attack this time.

Salmon waited, and once she heard another cry, she stood strongly, watching as the hawk swooped down. This time, Salmon leapt up and sunk her claws into the hawk's chest, causing it to screech in pain. The hawk collapsed in the snow, extending its wings to fly again. Salmon quickly slashed at one wing. The hawk pecked at Salmon's side and scraped its talons against her leg,

causing her to cry out in pain.

Salmon fell off. The hawk attempted to fly, but couldn't. Suddenly, Salmon had a brilliant idea. She moved forward and leapt again, ignoring the pain in her leg. She sunk her claws into the other wing, then finally, the hawk's neck.

It was only a matter of seconds before the hawk staggered and fell, dead. Salmon breathed in relief, then began to cheer. This was her kill! She had killed the hawk, and now, it was prey! She would bring this back to her father!

After a few minutes of joy, Salmon began to heave the hawk down the hill, careful not to tear at it too much. It had to be in good condition when she showed it to her father.

Using her nose to note the scent of the forest, she began padding through with the hawk that was bigger than her. She guessed she would make it back by nightfall.

Throughout the rest of the day, Salmon ignored the sharp pain in her leg and the growling of her stomach and focused solely on returning with pride and honor.

By the time the sun began to sink, Salmon passed by the familiar cherry blossom tree and smiled, whispering, "I did it, Mother."

In only a few minutes, she collapsed in the camp, her eyes dizzy. Cats gasped, and immediately, her father made his way towards her.

"Salmon, Salmon, are you okay?!" he shouted.

Salmon's vision cleared, and she nodded, standing up. The blood around her wound had dried by now, though her leg still pained her. She slowly pushed her hawk forward and bowed.

"I-I killed this, Father, and now I present it to you."

"What is it? What is it?!" Cats called, trying to see through the crowd.

"Quiet!" Oak shouted. He gasped at the dead hawk, inspecting it. "Unbelievable."

"What is it?!"

"Quiet!" Oak repeated. He looked up at Salmon, proud. "My daughter, you killed this?"

"Yes, Father. It scraped my leg, but it was worth it," Salmon explained, showing her wounded leg.

"Berry will tend to you in a matter of moments, but for now, we must celebrate."

"What? What did she even catch?!" a familiar voice came. Storm.

The tom stumbled through the crowd and froze as his eyes gazed onto the hawk.

"Unbelievable," he whispered. "You couldn't have killed that thing."

"Well, I did!" Salmon boasted.

"Your daughter will make a fine leader," Berry explained. "Killing a hawk on her first hunt? That's true leadership."

Salmon grinned, smiling as the cats cheered for her.

"It is then that I agree to train my daughter. I'm incredibly proud of you, Salmon," Oak smiled.

"Thank you, Father," she said, following Berry to the den to be tended to. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Storm looking betrayed.

Good, she thought. *That'll teach him that I'm no ordinary she-cat.*

Chapter 22

"Wake up! Wake up!" came the frantic calls of Frostflight's kits as they pushed against Lemonkit's tired and sleepy body.

Lemonkit slowly opened her eyes, letting out a long yawn as she watched the small gray she-cat push her mewling kits away.

"Today's the big day," she announced.

Lemonkit looked around, watching Daisyfeather clean up her five kits. Out of the corner of her eye, she could see Thymekit smiling at her, just like he normally did.

Lemonkit stood up, Frostflight's tongue running along her fur as she fixed up her adopted kit's pelt. Lemonkit sat in silence, still in disbelief that today she would be made an apprentice. She'd been in the nursery so long with her siblings and friends that it would feel weird to leave them all behind.

At least Thymekit and his siblings will be made apprentices with me, she thought.

Loud footsteps made Lemonkit spin around. She turned, seeing Hailfrost. He raced forward, sitting down next to his mate.

"Are you excited for today, Lemonkit?" Hailfrost asked.

Lemonkit nodded, turning around to face him as Frostflight finished.

"Are you all right? You don't look too excited to become an apprentice," Frostflight observed.

"No, I am," Lemonkit argued. "It feels weird leaving you and your kits, Frostflight. I won't be in the nursery anymore to play. I have to train now."

"Your siblings will be made apprentices alongside you in a

few moons," Frostflight reminded her.

"Training is essential in a warrior's life. You'll do great," Hailfrost told her.

Lemonkit grinned. "Thank you...for all you've done. You're the best parents I could've ever hoped for."

Hailfrost grinned and wrapped his tail around her while Frostflight touched her nose to the top of Lemonkit's forehead.

"We're very proud of you, and we'll be watching you during the ceremony," Hailfrost reminded her.

"We'll miss you," came a small mew.

Lemonkit looked past Frostflight and Hailfrost, spotting Troutkit and the others clustered together.

"Oh, I'll miss you, too!" she called, racing towards the pair of kits. They'd grown over the past moon, though Lemonkit still lingered over them as they all moved closer to her to say their weepy good-byes.

"Will you miss us?" Pearkit whimpered.

"Of course I will. It'll only be a few moons alone in the nursery. You'll be able to make all sorts of friends, and soon, we'll be training together. Won't that be exciting?"

"Why can't Silverstar make us warriors earlier?" Desertkit frowned.

"Because you still have growing to do. Now do me a favor, and behave for Frostflight, all right?"

"We will," the kits said in unison.

"Good."

"Are you ready, Lemonkit?" Raspberrykit asked, rushing towards her friend's side.

Lemonkit looked back at the kits and her family one last time before nodding and following her outside into the camp.

"ALL CATS OLD ENOUGH TO CATCH THEIR OWN PREY, JOIN BENEATH THE ROCK FOR A CLAN MEETING!" Silverstar yowled.

Lemonkit stood by Thymekit on the rock, watching as her fellow NightClan members gathered below her, all awaiting to see the six new apprentices. From the distance, Lemonkit could see Hailfrost standing below with Frostflight and the kits. She waved her tail, watching as they waved back.

"Today, we will be making six kits into six apprentices. Each of these kits has reached six moons, and now, it is time for them to begin training to become a warrior of NightClan!"

The clan yowled for the kits, making Lemonkit blush.

"Lemonkit, step forward, please," Silverstar called.

Lemonkit didn't see Silverstar much around camp, but now, she was closer to the leader than she ever had been before. The silver she-cat was gray, white forming around her muzzle. She was obviously older, and Lemonkit speculated that her deputy, Ashclaw, would be taking over soon. Her eyes were a bright amber, so much that they scared Lemonkit a little bit.

"Lemonkit has reached six moons, which means she is ready to train. Lemonkit," she said, turning towards the kit. "From this day forward, until you receive your warrior name, you shall be known as Lemonpaw!"

Lemonpaw's paws tingled with excitement. Now, it was time for her mentor. Oh, who would it be? She scanned the crowd, guessing she was fine with whatever warrior was chosen.

"Firelight," Silverstar spoke.

Except him.

Lemonpaw watched as the ginger tabby tom padded

forward. He looked upset, almost angry with Silverstar, but he hid the expression well.

Lemonpaw didn't know Firelight too well. She caught him looking at her from time to time, but it was often in the form of a glare. She had heard stories of his mate that had been murdered in battle, shortly after his sister was murdered. Apparently he hadn't been the same since the incident.

"Yes, Silverstar?"

"You are a strong warrior capable of training Lemonpaw. Teach her everything she knows."

"I will, Silverstar," Firelight agreed.

Lemonpaw awkwardly rushed down the rock, touching noses to the tom. Up close, his eyes were a bright green, though they looked as if they had become dull over the course of many moons.

She touched his nose against his, then padded back up the rock, watching as the other five kits were made into apprentices. All of them seemed to be given good warriors, while Lemonpaw was stuck with the mentor that no cat would ever want. And what was worse? She would have to deal with this stuck-up tom for six moons.

As the ceremony finished, the cats called out for their new apprentices.

"LEMONPAW! THYMEPAW! RASPBERRYPAW! MANGOPAW! KOIPAW! WINDPAW!" the clan cried with excitement.

As the cheers began to die down and the crowd began to fade, Lemonpaw padded down the rock, finding her family.

"Oh, you looked great standing up there!" Frostflight exclaimed. "I'm so proud of you!"

"Ahem," came a cough.

Lemonpaw turned, noticing Firelight standing behind her.

"Are you ready, Lemonpaw?" he asked.

Lemonpaw looked back at her parents one last time. They eyed Firelight with uncertainty. For what reason, she was not sure.

"I'm ready," she sighed.

"All right. Let's go," he called.

Lemonpaw waved good-bye then followed Firelight into the woods in silence. She supposed her friends were having fun chatting with their mentors, but as for her, she found Firelight to be mysterious, as if he were holding a dark secret.

"Are we touring the forest?" Lemonpaw asked at last.

"Yes. I would've thought you'd known that," Firelight growled.

Great, he already hates me, Lemonpaw thought.

Firelight began pointing out rivers and meadows, discussing where the best prey could be found, where they'd look at the next couple of days.

"Over here is the SnowClan border," Firelight explained, stopping near some bushes.

Lemonpaw sniffed the air. The scent was familiar, but she wasn't sure why she found it that way.

"What are you doing?" Firelight asked.

"The SnowClan scent smells familiar," Lemonpaw told him.

"I'm not sure why. You've never met a SnowClan cat before, have you?"

"No."

"Then you need to learn to work your nose better. Now,

come on," Firelight growled, continuing to pad through the forest.

Other borders were shown, as were different plants and places.

"Over here!" Firelight called, racing towards a small pond that sat near a pine tree.

"It's a pond," Lemonpaw muttered.

"It's where you'll find moss," Firelight growled. "You have to make nests for the elders. Did you forget about that, too?"

"No!" Lemonpaw argued. "I haven't forgotten about anything!"

"Good. Now grab some moss."

"Aren't you going to teach me first?"

"Why?"

Lemonpaw growled and padded forward, ripping moss from the forest floor.

"You're doing it all wrong," Firelight complained. "By ripping it, you're tearing the moss and causing dirt to get all over it. You need to use your claws to dig it from the earth."

"Well, if you had taught me that, maybe I would've done it better!"

"Don't get sassy with me, young apprentice!" Firelight hissed. "You have a lot to learn these next six moons."

Lemonpaw opened her mouth to speak then closed it, beginning to use her claws to dig the moss out.

"Better," Firelight observed. "Now you need to get the water out of it. Any ideas?"

"Stomping on it?"

"You don't want to flatten it. Press your paw down on it lightly."

Lemonpaw followed his instructions, watching as water oozed out from the ball of moss onto the forest floor.

"Eh, you'll need more practice," Firelight growled as Lemonpaw showed him the moss nest.

"I tried my best," Lemonpaw argued.

"It's fine. I'm sure one elder will take pity on you. Come on, let's go."

Lemonpaw growled then followed her stuck-up mentor through the forest, praying six moons could go by in a flash.

Chapter 23

Sunrise awoke to feel her owner's soft hands running through her fur. She purred, opening an eye to glance up at her owner.

"Good morning," he said, grinning.

Sunrise purred and rubbed against him before leaping down his bed and heading out into the front room. Her sisters were already eating, though she'd been avoiding them lately. She spent most of her time outside talking to Fawn.

The she-cat could be a normal kit, it turned out. Many times, they would play. Once in awhile, Fawn would mention something about a StarClan cat. If Sunrise ever asked about clan cats, Fawn's eyes would widen, her pelt would shake, and she'd flee into her house. Sunrise had to keep her mouth shut most of the time.

"Look. Someone's finally up," Polly muttered to Holly.

"Should we eat her food?" Holly asked loudly.

"Go ahead. I'm not hungry," Sunrise scowled, padding past them to sit near the fireplace. It hadn't snowed in a week, but it was still incredibly cold, and she supposed another storm would be on its way soon.

After a few moments, Sunrise could hear her sisters footsteps scurry away. She waited until they were gone, and then she crept forward, finding her bowl still full. So the plan had continued to work.

Sunrise immediately dived into her food bowl, gobbling it up within minutes. Afterwards, she padded outside, hoping to work off her full stomach. Her sisters had gained an incredible amount of weight over the past few moons, but as for Sunrise, she had

remained slim, probably from all her racing around the backyard.

"Fawn! Fawn!" she called, looking around her backyard.

Within a few moments, the she-cat's head popped up from the fence.

"Sunrise! I was waiting for you!" Fawn explained, leaping down from her fence into Sunrise's backyard.

"Bit cold today, huh?" Sunrise observed, the cold weather nipping at her pelt.

"Yeah, I guess so," Fawn agreed.

"How's your day been?" Sunrise asked.

The previous day, Fawn had been muttering about a she-cat from some clan, and when Sunrise had asked what cat, Fawn had run off.

Sunrise always had some wild thought Fawn was angry with her and wouldn't speak to her again, but the next day, the she-cat would be outside, waiting for her.

"It's been all right," Fawn sighed, pushing snow around with her tiny brown paws.

"That's...good," Sunrise awkwardly replied.

"We need to talk, Sunrise," Fawn blurted out.

"About what?"

"I've been talking to the cats in this neighborhood," Fawn explained.

"What cats?" Sunrise pondered.

"That tom, Cracker, but there are other ones too. I see others pass by on fences, and I've talked to a few."

"And?"

"And...one cat told me about a she-cat named Anna," Fawn began.

"Who's Anna?" Sunrise questioned.

"She's apparently some wise she-cat. I know where she lives. The cat gave me directions. I'm just wondering if maybe she can help me..."

"But you hate talking about your...you know," Sunrise urged.

"I know, but maybe she can help," Fawn explained. "Will you please come with me to see her?"

Sunrise glanced back at her home. She knew if she stayed out too long, her owners would be looking for her.

"Okay, but only for a little bit. I don't want my owners to worry," she told Fawn.

Fawn's face lit up in a cheerful smile. "Thank you, Sunrise! I'm afraid she'll have evil powers," Fawn giggled as she leapt walked across the fence.

Sunrise joined her, following Fawn as they walked along snowy fences, flinching as the occasional dog barked at the two she-cats.

Sunrise could no longer see her home, and she only prayed Fawn knew the way back. She didn't want to be stranded out in the cold forever.

But maybe then I can escape to the forest, she thought, smiling to herself. It was a silly thought: to become a warrior? Impossible. She was a kittypet.

"Over here," Fawn whispered, pointing her tail to a small gray house with a snow-covered roof. Sunrise felt her stomach churn as they came closer. Not a sound came from the yard, and Sunrise was beginning to believe that Fawn's superstition was correct.

"Anna. Anna," Fawn spoke softly.

Sunrise glanced around, but spotted no she-cat.

The sudden rustle of bushes made Sunrise shriek and almost fall into another backyard. Thankfully, Fawn's quick tail caught ahold of her.

"Who's calling my name?" came an old, shaky voice.

"My name is Fawn," she began. "And this is my friend, Sunrise."

Sunrise peered closer, watching as an old brown tabby she-cat padded out of the bushes. Gray grew around her muzzle, and she squinted her eyes as if to see them better.

"Come down here," she commanded.

Sunrise looked at Fawn nervously and then obeyed, leaping down from the fence.

"Why are you here? I haven't seen you before," Anna wondered.

"Ma'am, I've heard you're one of the wisest kittypets in this neighborhood," Fawn began.

"Yes, but that does not mean I can tell the future," Anna spat. "If that's what you want, go away!"

"I'm not here for that," Fawn argued.

"Then why else would you come to me?" Anna asked.

"Please, Anna, listen to Fawn," Sunrise urged.

"Are you here to ask something too?" Anna asked, taking a step forward and gazing at Sunrise.

"N-No," Sunrise stammered.

"Do you know anything about the cats that live in the

woods?" Fawn asked.

"Another kittypet interested in warrior cats, eh? I suppose I'm supposed to fill your head with knowledge about them?"

"I just wanted the question answered," Fawn whimpered.

"Then yes, I do know about them. Why do you care?" Anna grumbled.

She's not very polite or kind, Sunrise thought.

"I-I didn't know who else to come though. Ever since I was a kit, I've had visions of starry cats. At first, it was only tiny glimpses, but as I've grown older, I have seen not only the starry cats, but she-cats giving birth, cats dying in battle, others fighting over a piece of meat."

Anna's eyes widened, so much so that Sunrise could see the bright green around her pupil.

"You have been blessed by StarClan," she gasped, bowing down to Fawn.

Sunrise looked around, wondering if she was supposed to bow, too.

"What does it mean?" Fawn asked. "It's been terrifying."

"My dear, it happens to very few cats. Sometimes, StarClan blesses a non-warrior with visions of their own. For what reason? No cat is sure. Some speculate that it is usually something to do with the future."

"You mean I'll be using these visions in the future?" Fawn asked.

"Perhaps," Anna nodded.

"But I don't understand any of it," Fawn complained.

"You've been given a rare gift, Fawn. StarClan is the

heavenly place of the dead warriors. It is a place of light, joy, eternal life. Only leaders and medicine cats usually possess this power of communicating with them."

"But no cat has spoken to me," Fawn explained. "I've only seen visions."

"Then maybe they will speak to you in the future," Anna told her. "You're a very lucky she-cat, Fawn. If you need any help translating dreams, come to me. I'm sorry for being so rude before. Many cats come asking me to tell their future. They ask for knowledge that will only harm others. But I will greatly serve you and StarClan."

"Did you come from a clan?" Sunrise asked.

Anna turned, as if she had forgotten Sunrise had been standing there.

"No, my mother did. She often spoke stories of the cats in the forest. I found out more information myself."

"How did you become a kittypet, then?" Sunrise asked.

"Sunrise!" Fawn scolded. "We're very grateful, Anna."

"What about this cat, Sunrise?" Anna asked Fawn, pointing to Sunrise. "Does she possess any warrior-like traits?"

"No, she's a kittypet through and through. Right, Sunrise?"

Sunrise nodded.

"Oh, of course," Anna nodded, though her suspicious eyeing of Sunrise made her shiver. What could Anna see that Sunrise could not?

Chapter 24

Lifekit's eyes opened up as soon as light entered through the nursery. Her paws tingled with excitement, and her lips curled into a smile. She would become an apprentice today!

Lifekit glanced around the nursery, finding the other queens and kits asleep. Frowning, Lifekit sat up and leaned against the corner of the den wall, watching as other warriors passed by, awaiting the apprentice ceremony that would take place.

Lifekit glanced at Splashleap, who lay curled up with her two daughters. She had stopped nursing Lifekit awhile ago, though Lifekit still wondered if she'd at least fix Lifekit's fur. She'd seen mothers do that to their kits before ceremonies dozens of times, but with no mother, who would fix her fur?

Lifekit shook these thoughts away, knowing she wanted too much from Splashleap. The she-cat had only nursed her, but she hadn't accepted her, treated her like her own kit. Lifekit was just a chore, someone Splashleap was forced to care for.

Goosekit's eyes opened slowly, and he let out a grin as he noticed Lifekit.

"Morning," she whispered.

Goosekit stood up, yawning.

"Are you becoming an apprentice today?" he asked.

Lifekit nodded, bouncing up and down with excitement.

Goosekit frowned, but shook the face away. "I'm happy for you," he admitted.

"You're not too much younger than me," Lifekit began, noticing his sorrow. "You'll be an apprentice shortly. I'll see you and your siblings soon."

"Unless Ripplekit decides to become a medicine cat apprentice," he admitted.

"If that's the life she wants then that's fine with me," Lifekit explained. "You and your brother should accept her wish."

"Is it time to get up already?" came Splashleap's croak. She rose to her feet, shoving at her daughters to wake up.

"Splashleap, I'm becoming an apprentice today!" Lifekit exclaimed.

Splashleap rolled her eyes. "Yes, I heard all about it yesterday...and the day before...and the day before that."

Lifekit frowned as she began running her tongue across her daughter's fur in order to wake them.

"Um, Splashleap," Lifekit began.

"What is it?" the she-cat asked, busy tending to her two kits.

"Well, it's just that..."

"Just what?" she asked.

"Lifekit!" came a sudden call.

Lifekit turned, noticing Mousestripe padding into the den.

"Mousestripe!" Lifekit exclaimed, padding towards the older she-cat.

Mousestripe purred upon seeing the young kit, and she rubbed her head against Lifekit's.

"Are you ready to become an apprentice today?" she asked.

Lifekit nodded vigorously.

"Well, Thornstar's already preparing to call cats together. You'll be heading up onto that rock in a few moments," Mousestripe explained. "Better say good-bye to the nursery now."

Lifekit nodded, turning to face the others. Quickly, she padded over towards Goosekit, Ripplekit, and Marshkit.

"I'll see you all soon," she explained.

"Good luck, Lifekit," Ripplekit said, placing her tail on Lifekit's shoulder.

Lifekit headed back to Mousestripe, only to receive a look of disapproval.

"Aren't you forgetting someone?" Mousestripe whispered.

Lifekit turned, facing Splashleap.

"Oh, um, thank you, Splashleap," Lifekit awkwardly said.

"Well, we can't just leave kits to die," Splashleap replied, simple as that, before padding away.

Lifekit looked at the walls of the nursery one last time, then padded outside, glad to be free.

"Mousestripe, is my fur okay?" Lifekit asked.

Mousestripe chuckled. "Here, I'll fix it for you," she explained, running her tongue across Lifekit's fur in attempt to smooth it down.

"Splashleap wouldn't have done it for me," Lifekit whimpered.

"Is that what this is about?" the spotted she-cat asked.

"I don't have a mother. Sometimes I don't notice. But sometimes...I do," Lifekit murmured.

Mousestripe sighed. "My mother has been dead for awhile, too, Lifekit. But I can assure you that I don't miss my fur being tugged at. Why, my sister and I hated it when Lilywhisker wanted to clean our fur," she laughed.

"But you grew up with a mother, Mousestripe," Lifekit explained. "I haven't."

Mousestripe frowned. "Well, my kithood wasn't too happy either, with my half-sisters and half-brothers. Smokestar wasn't a great father. He was flawed."

Lifekit frowned, not hearing of half-sisters or half-brothers before. She realized there was a lot about Mousestripe she did not know.

"ALL CATS OLD ENOUGH TO CATCH THEIR OWN PREY, JOIN BENEATH THE ROCK FOR A CLAN MEETING!" Thornstar yowled.

"Looks like they're calling you," Mousestripe explained, pushing Lifekit forward. "You'll see us and your father in the audience!" she called.

Lifekit nodded, racing off to the large rock that stood in the center of the camp. Thornstar stood, smiling as Lifekit slowly climbed up the rock, in shock to see all of her clanmates gathered below her.

Lifekit stood proudly, noticing her father, Mousestripe, Stormnight, and Graytail smiling at her. From the distance, she could see Goosekit and his siblings popping their head out of the nursery, Blueocean beside them.

"Lifekit has reached six moons," Thornstar began. "She is now able to become an apprentice. Lifekit," he said, turning towards her, "From this day forward, until you receive your warrior name, you shall be known as Lifepaw."

Lifepaw's eyes widened, and she felt as if StarClan's wind had blown against her and filled her with the gifts to be an apprentice.

"Tinypelt," Thornstar called.

Lifepaw watched as a tiny gray she-cat padded forward, her eyes fixed on Thornstar. Did he expect this tiny she-cat to teach

her?

"You are fierce, yet kind. Please, teach this onto Lifepaw," Thornstar spoke.

"I shall, Thornstar," Tinypelt nodded.

Lifepaw raced down the rock, awkwardly touching noses to her new mentor. Then, she raced back up onto the rock, just in time to be praised by her clanmates.

"LIFEPAW! LIFEPAW!" they shouted at the young she-cat.

When the crowd began to fade, Lifepaw padded down to greet her family. Patchfur rushed towards her, purring.

"You did incredibly well, Lifepaw. Your mother would be proud," he explained. By the look of his green eyes, Lifepaw could tell he actually meant it.

"Your fur looked great," Mousestripe whispered jokingly.

Both Stormnight and Graytail gave her a pat on the back with their tails.

"Your mentor is waiting," Mousestripe told Lifepaw.

Lifepaw nodded, watching Tinypelt pacing by the edge of camp.

"Bye! See you all later!" she exclaimed, rushing off to greet her mentor.

Tinypelt stood, smiling as Lifepaw padded forward.

"Good morning," she called. "Are you ready to begin?"

Lifepaw nodded, following the she-cat into the forest. She was bigger than Lifepaw, but not by much. In fact, Lifepaw guessed she was one of the smallest in the clan. How had she ever gone through training at that size?

"Is this your first time in the forest?" Tinypelt asked.

Lifepaw nodded, glancing around at the snowy trees. Newleaf would be coming in about a moon, something Lifepaw was looking forward to. She'd been sick of the cold and the snow.

Tinypelt began showing her around, introducing borders, showing her the best hunting spots, pointing to dangerous parts of the forest. Overall, she seemed like an incredibly nice she-cat. Lifepaw actually felt glad to have her instead of a grumpy old tom.

"This is where we get moss," Tinypelt explained, pointing to wet moss that clung to a tree. "You'll be taking some to the elders."

Lifepaw nodded.

"You don't talk much," Tinypelt giggled.

"I think I'm just overwhelmed with everything," Lifepaw explained. "Should I grab some moss?"

"Sure. I'll show you how to deal with it from there," Tinypelt explained.

Lifepaw nodded, peeling moss from the tree with her teeth. When she felt she had a reasonable amount, she showed it to Tinypelt.

"Good job," Tinypelt exclaimed. "Okay, now we've got to make sure it isn't damp. Lightly stomp out the water," she explained. "Of course, the snow is a bit of a problem. It's important to place it on solid grand first."

Lifepaw watched as Tinypelt dug the snow up from the ground until brown dirt could be seen below. Then, she grabbed the moss from Lifepaw, beginning to stomp out the water. When a large amount of water had poured onto the ground, Tinypelt tossed the now dry moss to Lifepaw, placing the snow back over the spot she had dug it up.

"You'll try tomorrow," she explained. "Come on. Let's go."

Lifepaw nodded, following her back through the forest.

"Good job today, Lifepaw. You remind me of your father," she explained.

Lifepaw tilted her head. "How do you know what my father is like?"

Lifepaw didn't feel like her father. He was always busy, too busy for her. Most of the time she was compared to her mother.

Tinypelt turned, now confused.

"You mean you don't know?"

"Don't know what?" Lifepaw asked.

"I'm Tinypelt, Patchfur's *sister.* Has he never mentioned me before?" she asked.

"I-I knew my father had siblings, but I didn't know who they were."

"Jayfur is our brother," Tinypelt explained.

"So you obviously know a thing or two about my father," Lifepaw said.

Tinypelt nodded.

"He was a hard worker, pretty quiet too. I remember when we used to play with your mother."

"You mean my mother was your guys' nursery mate?"

Tinypelt nodded. "Yup. I was a bit surprised Thornstar assigned me to you. Kin isn't usually assigned to mentor, but I suppose we don't know each other too well."

"My father's parents. Who are they?"

"Oh, Mossheart and Fernbranch? I'm surprised you don't know them either. Your father has kept you hidden from his side of

the family. I don't know why."

"I don't know why either," Lifepaw sighed, padding back into the camp with her newly-discovered aunt.

Chapter 25

"Salmon, it's time to rise!" came Oak's raspy voice.

Salmon awoke, glancing around the new den she slept in. It had been a moon since her father had agreed to let her train. During that time, she had been catching prey, practicing battle moves, and learning how to become a good leader like her father.

Mouse and Honey slept near her, Storm sulking in the corner of the den. It was obvious he was still jealous that Salmon had brought back a large hawk that day. Several times since then, Storm had come up to her, demanding she tell him where she found a dead hawk lying around. He had spread rumors that Salmon had found the bird, that she had gotten another cat to kill it for her. Salmon ignored these rumors though, even if they tended to bug her to a large extent.

Since Oak had taken her under his wing, Salmon had visited her mother's cherry blossom tree. Leaf-bare was coming to a end, the snow half-melted. The trees had already begun to sprout a little, even if all that was visible were small flowers enclosed in leaves, not yet visible. Soon, when the cherry blossoms grew and floated through the air, Salmon would be filled with her mother's spirit.

Salmon rose to her feet, quietly sneaking out of the den to greet her father who stood, waiting for her.

"What are we learning today, Father?" she asked curiously, following him into the woods.

"More hunting," he explained.

"But, Father!" Salmon whined, "You already know I'm a great hunter! Did the hawk I brought back not tell you that?"

"The full moon has only shone once since you became my apprentice. You may be a better hunter than most, but you still

need practice," Oak explained, a stern look on his face.

"But if I'm ahead of everyone else, do I have to train six moons?" she asked.

"Of course!" Oak snapped, causing Salmon to jump.

"Being the ruler, the queen, if you may, of this tribe takes hard work, Salmon. I trained for six moons as well, and even then, I did not know everything about leading. It will take moons of experience."

"Oh," Salmon replied quietly, trudging through the woods with her father.

"Let's have a test today," Oak suggested.

"A test?" Salmon asked.

"Catch as many pieces of prey as you can. Each time you catch a piece of prey, please bring it back to me," Oak explained. "If you think that hunting is so easy, we shall see how great your skills are."

Salmon knew pride was her flaw, but she couldn't admit to her father that she couldn't catch many pieces of prey. She'd been catching one or two every day, but it sounded as if he wanted ten pieces of prey from her.

"Fine!" she said, stalking off.

"I will be by the tall oak tree!" her father called as she padded off.

Sunrise nodded, padding into the thick woods. Perhaps her mother would send her another miracle, like the hawk. Or perhaps she'd learn her lesson not to jaw off about herself to her father.

Snow clumped onto Salmon's paws as she walked. With each step she took, more snow would flee off the ground, and moist dirt would be revealed below. Soon enough, her paws were wet and brown with dirt.

Salmon ignored this though, continuing to pad through the woods.

She sniffed the air, and then suddenly, she noticed a white bushy tail.

"Rabbit," she murmured, watching as it came out of the burrow that had sheltered it throughout the winter.

Salmon crouched down, then pounced, her paw landing right on the rabbit's behind. She quickly shoved her claw into its side, and within moments, she had her first piece of prey.

"This isn't so bad," she told herself, running off to show her father the first piece of prey she'd caught.

Oak sat near the oak tree, smiling as Salmon ran towards him with a rabbit in her jaws.

"And what have you caught?" he asked.

Salmon dropped the furry rabbit beside him, smiling.

"This rabbit just came out of its hole. I caught it quickly," she explained.

Oak inspected the rabbit, then frowned. "It's plumped than what we've had, but you've ruined the rabbit with your claw marks. There are three claw marks on this rabbit. What cat deserves this rabbit?"

"I did what I had to do to kill it. The meat is still good," Salmon argued.

"Then if it is good meat, the rabbit is yours to eat tonight."

"Fine!" Salmon shouted, running off to find a better piece of prey to present to her father. She padded through the woods quietly, keeping her ears pricked in case she heard any movement.

But she heard no movement, and for a long time, she padded through the woods, lonely and bored. It was already mid-day, and so far, she'd only found only small piece of prey.

Salmon, now in defeat, sat down next to a large pine tree, letting

out a deep sigh.

Suddenly, a flash of gray caught her eye. Across from her was a little mouse, scampering about the forest floor.

Salmon crouched, cautiously approaching the mouse. It was plump and full, most likely from moons of sleep. She pounced, killing the mouse in one swipe.

With the dead mouse in her jaws, she padded off quickly, finding her father sitting impatiently near the oak tree.

"I would've thought you'd bring back better prey for being gone so long," her father told her as soon as she reached him.

Salmon ignored his harsh comment, dropping the mouse at his feet.

Oak crouched down, inspecting the piece of prey.

"Better," he observed. "It's not the best mouse, but it'll do."

Salmon nodded and laid down, exhausted.

"What are you doing?" Oak questioned.

"I'm tired, Father," Salmon explained.

"But you told me you could catch all this prey!" Oak exclaimed.

Salmon sighed, resigning from her job. "No. I-I let my pride get in the way. Finding prey in leaf-bare is hard and takes work. I'm lucky to have found two pieces of prey."

Oak smiled at her warmly.

"Do you see why it takes many moons of practice, Salmon? We cannot learn to hunt or fight all within a moon. A leader must practice even harder than the others," Oak explained calmly.

Salmon nodded slowly.

"Now come. You must be tired from all that hunting," Oak told her.

When they arrived back home, cats were already waiting for them, immediately running up to Oak, asking him questions, giving reports. When they ate, Salmon grabbed the rabbit she had caught earlier, while Oak took her mouse. Confused, Salmon looked up at Oak. The leaders and their kin were given the best prey of the day. So why had they picked the worst?

"This was the best you could catch, so therefore, it is the best," Oak explained, biting into her mouse.

Salmon nodded, though she supposed it was just to save another cat from eating the terrible prey. As she bit into her rabbit, she decided it wasn't bad. There was lots of meat, even if some was damaged by her claws. It wasn't as good as what she was usually accustomed to eating, but she gulped down the entire thing, licking her lips in satisfaction afterwards.

Later, that night, she fell asleep soundly, imagining herself as leader. She knew the day would be upon her soon.

Chapter 26

"Lemonpaw! It's time to get up!" Firelight screeched from the opening of the apprentice den. Lemonpaw lazily opened her eyes groaning. The tom padded away quickly, and Lemonpaw rose to her feet, tired and exhausted.

The day prior, Lemonpaw had given one of the elders a "too-damp" nest, so Firelight had punished her by making her collect new fresh moss for every elder and pick off their ticks for the day. She'd been working until the sun had gone down.

The apprentice den was empty, except for a few cats who had gotten the day off. Lemonpaw quickly walked out, finding Firelight sitting impatiently near the center of the camp.

"Sorry!" Lemonpaw shouted as she ran towards him. It was fib, of course. She should've guessed Firelight would wake her early, but he knew how hard she had worked.

"It's important to rise early," Firelight began.

Lemonpaw rolled her eyes, awaiting another lecture from the ginger tom. He'd been a terrible mentor to her over the past moon, always hissing at her, lecturing her from time to time. She didn't even know why Silverstar had assigned the tom.

"I was busy yesterday," Lemonpaw used as an excuse.

"Yes, busy with your punishment. Eat a mouse quick. We're running late," he grumbled.

Lemonpaw nodded, quickly grabbing a mouse from the fresh-kill pile. She sat down enxt to Raspberrypaw and Thymepaw, chewing away at her mouse.

Thymepaw signed "Good morning" but Lemonpaw groaned.

"Not having a good day?" Raspberrypaw asked.

"I'll say! You know how hard I was working last night! Firelight shouted at me this morning about getting up early. I'm tired and exhausted. I really wish he had given me the day off."

"Well, Tawnyfire let me sleep in as long as I wanted today," Raspberrypaw boasted.

"Not helping," Lemonpaw replied.

Lemonpaw watched as Thymepaw signed, "He's helping you".

"I know," Lemonpaw sighed. "But he's so stuck up. I don't know why Silverstar assigned him."

"Silverstar's a good leader. She knows what she's doing. I heard Firelight was a great warrior until this past leaf-fall. Guess his sister's and mate's death just hit him hard."

"Yeah, well, he shows it," Lemonpaw grumbled, turning to see the tom sitting impatiently by the edge of camp.

"I'll see you guys later. Bye," she called, waving to her friends as she padded off to greet the ginger tom.

"I thought a mouse could be eaten quicker," Firelight said.

Lemonpaw ignored him, padding into the woods with the tom. He walked beside her silently, gazing around the woods. The snow had almost melted now, clumps of it still hanging onto dirt.

"There will be more prey in new-leaf, right?" Lemonpaw wondered.

Firelight nodded. "Yes. Now that leaf-bare is nearly through, the prey will be coming out again. And them green-leaf will bring much prey."

Lemonpaw nodded slowly.

"What are we doing today?" she asked.

"Hunting," Firelight replied.

"But you just said—"

"I know what I said! Just because it's not completely new-leaf doesn't mean there's no prey. We're practicing hunting moves. Do you remember the one I taught you from a few sunrises ago?"

Lemonpaw frowned. The move had totally slipped her mind! It had something to do with a crouch.

"Uh..." She crouched down, unsure.

"No!" Firelight groaned. "Get down lower. Keep your tail up."

Lemonpaw did as she was instructed, but she still failed to please her mentor.

"No, for the love of StarClan! Down more, Lemonpaw!"

"I'm trying!" she shouted.

"You're scaring away all the prey with your whining. There!" he said at last, using his strong paw to push her down.

Lemonpaw growled quietly, focused on nothing but the damp ground.

"We're going to learn to pounce today," Firelight explained.

"Great!" Lemonpaw exclaimed, jumping up.

"No, stay down!" Firelight snapped. "Actually, just watch me. I smelled a squirrel nearby."

"I don't smell anything," Lemonpaw admitted, smelling the warm air.

"That's because your nose isn't that great yet. You can tell clanmates apart, but you can't tell the scent of prey yet. This way," he said, leading her through some bushes. Lemonpaw padded

behind him quietly, guessing it was best if she just kept her mouth shut and continued the lesson normally.

"Here we are," Firelight called, stepping out into a clearing.

"I don't see a squirrel," Lemonpaw observed.

Firelight shushed her, crouching down in some grass. Lemonpaw sat, not sure what Firelight was stalking. She had not seen a squirrel!

Then, suddenly a strong smell hit her, and she realized a squirrel was nearby. Ahead of Firelight, she could see a small gray tail moving slowly. Suddenly, Firelight pounced. She watched as his back paws bounced off the ground, and he came up a moment later with a dead squirrel.

"Wow," Lemonpaw gasped.

"Now, you try that pounce."

"Oh, okay," Lemonpaw awkwardly replied, crouching down in the grass. She tried to remain as low as she could, remembering Firelight's lecture earlier.

"Like this?" she asked.

"Yes," Firelight confirmed.

Lemonpaw leapt, though instead of bouncing up from her back feet, she bounced from all four, leaping high into the air and landing on her paws.

"No!" Firelight groaned. It didn't matter what she did. The tom was always disappointed in her.

"Your back paws! You're not jumping up! You're leaping forward," Firelight scolded. He grabbed a rock and shoved it a dozen pawsteps in front of Lemonpaw.

"This is the prey," he explained, pointing to the gray rock. "It's your job to leap forward and try to grab it."

"Okay," she nodded, crouching again. This time, she focused solely on moving forward. She used her back paws to spring herself forward, and she landed near the rock, her paws outstretched to catch it.

"Good!"

Lemonpaw turned around, surprised. Firelight rarely ever complimented her.

"Keep trying," he ordered.

Lemonpaw nodded, continuing the same move again and again on the motionless rock, using her back paws to spring forward.

This isn't so bad, she thought. *I'll be catching prey in no time.*

She continued this for awhile until Firelight called for a break.

"We're heading back into the woods. We're going to try to find some real prey for you to catch," he explained.

"Oh, okay," Lemonpaw agreed. Though she could catch an immobile object fine, she wasn't sure she was ready to catch a mouse.

He led her back into the woods, and they once again became shrouded by tall trees and green foliage. Clumps of snow lay scattered around the floor, and Lemonpaw would gasp in surprise each time she stepped in one, the cold substance traveling from her paws up to the rest of her body.

"Would you stop doing that?!" Firelight begged.

"Sorry. I'm not expecting it," Lemonpaw snapped.

"Quiet. I hear a noise," Firelight shushed. Lemonpaw gazed around, her ears sharp, her eyes alert. She could hear a quiet shuffling sound, and she gasped, seeing a small mouse nibble on a seed.

"It's yours. Remember what you were taught," Firelight whispered.

Lemonpaw turned and crouched down. She then leapt too soon, and the mouse scurried away in fear.

"Mouse-dung!" she spat.

"It's your fault. You were too far away!" Firelight hissed.

"Why do you always shout at me? It's so annoying!"

"What do you mean?"

"You're so cruel and mean, always yelling at me, lecturing me!"

"I'm helping you become a better warrior!"

"No you're not!" Lemonpaw shrieked.

Firelight paused, then began to speak in a calm manner. "I didn't assign myself to mentor you. Silverstar did. If you have a problem, then I suggest you go see Silverstar yourself."

"It's because of your mate and sister, isn't it?"

"What did you say?" Firelight asked, his green eyes flashing in anger.

"That's why you always take your anger out on me!"

Firelight edged closer to her, growling. "Don't you ever mention Thrushwing or Cherryfur in front of me like that. They're not weapons to use against me. Go! You're done for today!"

"Fine!" she spat, running off towards camp. She was in a rage of fury, knowing Firelight took his anger out on her because of unfair reasons.

She knew seeing Silverstar was out of the option. A young apprentice begging for a different mentor? Impossible. She'd never

heard of such foolishness.

Angry, Lemonpaw stomped into camp, deciding on spending the rest of the day in the den, sulking in anger.

"I wish I had a better mentor," she murmured, exhaustion finding her. Slowly, she closed her eyes and fell asleep.

Chapter 27

Sunrise awoke on a lovely spring day, warm sunlight shining into the room she and her owner slept in. She lazily opened her eyes, warm from the sun. The snow had almost melted, only a few clumps shoved in the corners of the fence remaining.

"Sunrise, breakfast!" came the voice of the boy.

Sunrise purred and stood up, following him outside of his door and into the kitchen. Holly and Polly had already eaten one full meal, plus additional treats. They were incredibly plump, sleeping all day, eating in their free time.

Though Sunrise thought that her body appearance would make them jealous, they would often whisper, "Does she not like to eat like a kittypet? She looks like one of those forest cats? Barely has any meat on her at all".

Sunrise ignored these comments, often laughing at their inability to move their chubby legs from under then. They were spoiled rotten.

Food was poured into a small silver bowl, and Sunrise ate away, licking her lips in satisfaction once she finished. Holly and Polly didn't bother eating her food anymore since it required too much effort to even move over to her bowl. She guessed it was best they didn't explode.

"Pst, Sunrise!" came a sharp hiss from Holly.

Sunrise turned, rolling her eyes. She padded over to the two sisters, who lay curled up on the couch like feathery brown donuts.

"Yes?" Sunrise asked.

"Where are you going each day?" Polly asked.

"What do you mean?"

"You're always gone a couple hours a day," Holly explained. "You head out that cat door in the morning, come back in the afternoon for a nap, then disappear until dinnertime."

"Why does it matter?" Sunrise asked.

"What can you possibly find interesting outside?"

"Why don't you get up and see?"

Holly laughed at this, and Sunrise laughed too.

"You're right. You couldn't make it on your chubby legs," she giggled.

Polly glared at Sunrise, a low growl rumbling in her throat.

"Yeah, well, we didn't care anyway," Polly growled.

Sunrise laughed, padding away. Her sisters were still incredibly annoying, but they didn't seem to care about her much anymore. Her mind drifted back to Marshmallow, her favorite sister. What was she doing?

And what about Hazelnut and Tiger? Did they enjoy their new families?

What was her mother and father doing?

All these questions circled Sunrise's mind as she padded inside, a cool breeze sweeping the backyard. It was the beginning of spring, but it sure was cold.

"Sunrise, you're here!" came a sudden exclamation.

Sunrise turned, noticing Fawn perched on her fence. She had grown over the winter, now taller than Sunrise. Sunrise guessed she was okay with it. After all, she was smaller than Holly and Polly, and she remembered being smaller than her other siblings.

"Good morning!" Sunrise called, waving her ginger tail.

"I talked to Anna yesterday," Fawn explained.

"Oh. What about?"

"I dreamt some weird stuff," Fawn admitted.

"Like what?" Sunrise asked.

Fawn shrugged. "It was dark. I couldn't really see. I saw some trees, I guess? But really all I could see were a pair of eyes, or maybe they weren't eyes."

"Eyes?"

"Yeah. They were glowing red. But then again, Anna said it might've just been some colors. Red eyes though. Can you imagine?"

Sunrise laughed. "Seems like an unfortunate eye color."

"I asked Anna what it meant, but she wasn't sure. She said something about light in the darkness. Maybe it's symbolic or something."

"You don't seem as frightened by your dreams," Sunrise admitted. She regretted the words as soon as she spoke them.

Fawn wasn't angry though. Instead, she smiled.

"Yeah. Anna's been a real help. The dreams are becoming more vivid now. Sometimes, I can see cats, full detail cats, hunting or chatting. They're usually in one spot, but sometimes I've seen different parts of the forest."

"That's awesome!" Sunrise exclaimed. "Are they excellent hunters?"

"I don't always see hunting, but yeah, I think so. Once, I could see their pile of food. It was *huge,* Sunrise! It was all fresh food, like mice and squirrels. It's amazing that they could catch something like that."

"Does that mean anything?"

Fawn shook her head. "Anna says that StarClan has given me the gift to see the clans from my home. Sometimes my dreams mean something, but no cat has spoken to me. The dream I spoke to Anna about was odd though. I had never had such a blurry dream, not since my kithood. Oh well. Want to go see her? She said she'd tell us about clan cats."

"Sure!" Sunrise agreed, leaping up onto her fence.

She followed Fawn on the wooden fence, grinning. It was great to have a friend to keep her company. They'd grown closer near the end of winter, often visiting Anna to listen to her stories.

Though they weren't much of kits anymore, they still enjoyed playing with each other and tussling about.

From the distance, Sunrise could spot Anna's home. She could spot the gray paint and the red-colored roof.

"Come on!" Fawn called, leaping down into Anna's backyard.

Sunrise followed, landing in a pile of snow.

"Aw, yuck!" Sunrise gagged, wiping wet snow from her pelt. Fawn giggled, ducking as Sunrise shook her pelt to send snow flying everywhere.

"Fawn, Fawn is that you?!" came an old raspy voice.

Sunrise turned, watching as the old brown tabby padded out from behind a bush, her green eyes lighting up as she spotted the two.

"Ah, you're here too, Sunrise," Anna purred.

Though Sunrise enjoyed Anna's stories and enjoyed spending time with her, she was aware that Anna preferred seeing Fawn more than Sunrise. Fawn was a gifted cat, blessed from StarClan. Sunrise was just a friend that tagged along, a kittypet wanting to be a clan cat.

"We're here for some stories, Anna," Fawn explained.

"Stories, huh? About clan cats, I presume?"

Sunrise and Fawn both nodded vigorously.

"Ah, well, make yourself comfortable," Anna chuckled. The two sat down from across the old she-cat, awaiting her story of adventure.

"My mother used to tell me about my grandfather, a strong gray tabby tom named Shadowfoot. He was the best warrior in the clan, and she used to talk about how valiantly he fought in battles, bringing glory to the clan."

Both Sunrise and Fawn exchanged excited glances, awaiting for the story to continue.

"Once, a large tom from another clan trespassed onto their territory to plan a sneak attack. Why, Shadowfoot stopped him before he could even move a paw! The clan awarded him then by making him deputy! Everyone was so pleased, proud that the young tom would be their leader."

"He sounds amazing!" Sunrise exclaimed.

"But it was too good to be true. The clan planned another attack the following evening. They raided the camp, and the warriors fought. He died trying to help his mother, an elder at the time, escape. It was truly a loss."

Sunrise froze. She had expected a great story, but it had only ended in tragedy. Was that every warrior story?

"Wait, so he just...died? And people forgot about him?" Sunrise asked.

"Sunrise!" Fawn warned.

Anna chuckled. "Yes, he died. Of course cats didn't forget him. My grandmother was heartbroken. But a new deputy was assigned, and they drove the clan out the next try."

"They didn't need his help? But you said he was a great warrior!"

"He was. Clans are different, Sunrise. I don't think you understand the message."

"What message?" Sunrise asked. "It sounds like warriors don't even matter. They can just easily be killed off and cats will forget about them no matter what they do."

Anna, still calm, smiled. "No, dear. Some cats are always thought of as extraordinary. The entire clan attended his burial and spent the whole night awake during vigil. But remember, the clan was still a threat. They assigned a new deputy, and the clan continued. He was, and probably is still remembered for his achievements."

"See, Sunrise?" Fawn pointed out.

"I-I guess I see," Sunrise admitted. "I'm not a clan cat though, so I guess I don't understand everything."

"Well, none of us really will. Even I cannot comprehend everything," Anna explained. "My mother was a clan cat, not me. Now, thank you for visiting. Fawn, if I may have a word?"

Sunrise tilted her head curiously, watching as they padded towards a nearby bush. Sunrise waited impatiently, not wanting to return home until Fawn had reappeared.

The she-cat came moments later, looking as if she might be sick.

"Is everything okay?" Sunrise asked worriedly.

"Anna told me she was watching the clan cats nearby, asking some questions. They're recovering from a battle during the past fall. She-she thinks a dark spirit might have visited me."

"Nonsense!" Sunrise spat. "What dark spirit? It was a dream."

"But, Sunrise, clan dreams are different."

"Anna doesn't know what she's talking about," Sunrise admitted, though she wondered if maybe Anna was right.

"I don't know. Maybe you're right. But Anna told me this cat was trouble, and that if possible, I should avoid her."

"What cat?" Sunrise asked.

"She said her name was Moonstar."

Chapter 28

Lifepaw's eyes sprang open early in the morning, when most of the cats weren't up yet. She couldn't help but feel excitement flood through her paws. Today, Goosekit and Marshkit would become apprentices, and Ripplekit, a medicine cat apprentice.

She had been waiting so long for them to join her in the medicine cat den, and now, the day was finally here.

Quietly, she walked across bodies of sleeping cats, padding outside into the warm air. With new-leaf officially taking its toll on the clan, warmth had spread, the snow fully gone. She knew it would not snow again until she was a warrior, which made her even more excited.

"Pst, Lifepaw," came a quiet whisper.

Lifepaw turned, noticing Mousestripe sitting near the warriors den. Her spotted tail was curled around her feet, and she let out a grin.

"Hey," Lifepaw whispered back.

Mousestripe padded over towards her, near the fresh-kill pile. A few cats were up, doing patrol, eating some breakfast, but most were still asleep.

"You're up early," she observed.

Lifepaw nodded vigorously. "My friends are becoming apprentices today. I couldn't sleep."

"It seems you're more excited than them. I bet they're still asleep," Mousestripe noted, laughing.

"What are you doing up so early?" Lifepaw asked.

"Well, when you get to be an old she-cat, you seem to wake

up more," Mousestripe explained.

"Mousestripe! You're not old!" Lifepaw exclaimed.

"Hush!" Mousestripe hissed, quieting her down. "It's all right, Lifepaw. You can admit it. I'm not the young she-cat I used to be, but I can still certainly get around well. Why, Patchfur's parents are both elders. You don't see me in that den."

"About that..." Lifepaw began, wanting to ask more about Patchfur's siblings and family. She had not mentioned to her father that she was unaware her mentor was his sister.

"Oh, I see Thornstar!" Mousestripe spoke. "I'll see you at the ceremony, Lifepaw."

Lifepaw nodded slowly, watching as she padded off. Lifepaw sighed, turning over dirt on the ground. She knew she would no longer feel lonely anymore. During the past moon or so, she'd been practicing hard, but she hadn't been able to really bond with any apprentices. At least her friends would be joining her.

The sun had slowly begun to rise now, cats stirring. Lifepaw grabbed a small mouse from the fresh-kill pile. She was too excited to eat, really. Her friends were becoming apprentices!

Hearing frantic footsteps, she turned around, watching Tinypelt pad towards her with concern.

"You're up early, I see," Tinypelt murmured.

"Yes."

"You must be very excited for training today," she observed, laughing.

"Well, I wouldn't say that..." Lifepaw laughed. "My friends are becoming apprentices today."

"Oh, Blueocean's kits? Lovely little three. Pinethorn will be really proud. I didn't realize you'd be so excited for a ceremony. You can just meet me after their ceremony, then. I was hoping we'd

leave right as the clan shouted their names, but I understand it must mean a lot to you," Tinypelt purred.

"Thanks," Lifepaw replied, grinning.

As Tinypelt padded away, Lifepaw was only able to get one more bite of her mouse before she heard more footsteps. She turned, spotting Goosekit, Marshkit, and Ripplekit behind her.

"Hey!" she shouted.

"Hey!" Goosekit shouted back. Marshkit stood next to him, bouncing up and down excitedly.

"Are you ready for your ceremony?" Lifepaw asked.

Marshkit nodded vigorously. "It'll be great to train! Well, I can't say Ripplekit feels the same!"

Ripplekit laughed, sticking her tongue out at the tom. "Maybe Spiritheart will show me all the herbs today. I've watched him organize."

"Medicine cat talk. Blech," Marshkit spat, laughing.

"I'm really glad you're being a medicine cat though, Ripplekit," Lifepaw explained. "You'll be a great one."

"Thanks," Ripplekit purred.

"But you'll still be stuck with us," Goosepaw explained.

Lifepaw rolled her eyes. "Are you kidding? I've been waiting so long for this day."

"ALL CATS OLD ENOUGH TO CATCH THEIR OWN PREY JOIN BENEATH THE ROCK FOR A CLAN MEETING!" came Thornstar's call.

"Well, that's our cue," said Marshkit. "See you after the ceremony!"

"See you, guys!" Lifepaw waved back. They rushed off, Goosekit glancing behind to give one more smile before he became an apprentice.

Lifepaw rushed into the crowd, heading towards the front. She found her father situated near the front, next to Stormnight and Graytail.

"Hey. I was wondering when you'd show up," Patchfur greeted her.

"Yeah," Lifepaw nodded, glancing down. She hadn't spoken to her father much lately. He was on patrols, she was busy. She supposed it was always the same relationship they'd had. They'd never been as close as she had been with Shinypelt's family.

And it was absurd, wasn't it? She hung out with Mousestripe more than her own father...

"I caught a plump squirrel yesterday," she told him.

"That's a good girl. Maybe when you go on patrols you'll catch a lot."

It was always the same boring responses.

"Yeah," Lifepaw sighed.

"Look, Thornstar's speaking!" Graytail snapped.

"Goosekit, Marshkit, and Ripplekit have reached six moons, which means they are ready to become apprentices.

"Ripplekit," Thornstar called.

Lifepaw watched as the gray tabby she-cat padded forward, grinning.

"Ripplekit has decided to become our medicine cat apprentice. Ripplekit, from this day forward, until you become a full medicine cat, you shall be known as Ripplepaw. I call Spiritheart forward now."

Lifepaw turned, watching the gray tom emerge from the side of the crowd.

"Spiritheart, you have proved to be an amazing medicine cat, even if you were originally a warrior. Please, allow Ripplepaw to heal just as well as you."

"I will," Spiritheart assured him.

Lifepaw's heart fluttered with excitement as she watched Ripplepaw rush down the rock to touch noses with the tom. Her best friend was the new medicine cat apprentice.

Lifepaw turned her attention back to Thornstar, who continued the ceremony, deeming both Marshkit and Goosekit as apprentices, giving them mentors of them own. All good choices...

As the ceremony came to a close, the clan shouted, "MARSHPAW! GOOSEPAW! RIPPLEPAW!"

Lifepaw spotted Blueocean behind her, Pinethorn by her side. The two were grinning, proud of their kits.

Lifepaw hadn't seen that emotion in her father's eyes...

As the crowd dispersed, Lifepaw quickly lost her father again, deciding to congratulate her friends instead of finding him.

The three sat by the rock, grinning.

Lifepaw quickly rushed over, a large grin on her face.

"Congratulations!" she exclaimed.

"Thanks," Ripplepaw purred before her brothers could speak.

"She meant us," Marshpaw interrupted. "We're apprentices now."

"It's exciting, isn't it?" Goosepaw asked.

"Being an apprentice is extremely exciting," Lifepaw agreed. "I was excited at my ceremony too."

"Spiritheart's calling me," Ripplepaw explained. "I'll meet up with you later."

"Have fun counting herbs!" Marshpaw yelled as she ran off.

She watched Ripplepaw roll her eyes and stick out her tongue as she ran off to join the medicine cat.

"So, you guys are going on tours of the borders then, right?"

Goosepaw opened his mouth to speak, but was cut off by Marshpaw.

"I know, right? I wish we could learn hunting and fighting today!"

Goosepaw just shook his head.

"Gotta go!" Marshpaw called, running off with his mentor into the woods.

Lifepaw sat alone with Goosepaw now, an awkward silence floating above them.

"Well, um, good luck on your first day," Lifepaw offered.

"Thanks. Good look on your, erm, well day," he laughed. He lightly touched her shoulder with his tail, causing Lifepaw to shiver.

"See you soon!" he called, rushing off to join his mentor.

Lifepaw smiled, her heart beating rapidly. Something had changed between her and the tom, something she couldn't quite put her paw on.

"Lifepaw!" came Tinypelt's call.

"Coming!" Lifepaw called, running off with her mentor.

The day was normal, as always. First, she hunted, practiced

a couple fighting moves, then finished off gathering new moss for the elders. So far, none had complained, making her feel proud of herself. She did not want to pinch ticks off elders all day.

As the sun was beginning to set, Lifepaw padded with Tinypelt back towards camp.

"So...Tinypelt," Lifepaw began.

"Yes?" Tinypelt asked.

"Patchfur never really talks about you..."

"I guess not," Tinypelt replied.

"Well...why doesn't he?"

"I don't know," Tinypelt sighed. "But I'm surprised you didn't find out sooner I was his sister. You really had no clue?"

Lifepaw shook her head.

"I was hoping you'd know. Mousestripe helped me a few moons ago become mates with the love of my life, Moss-Eye. Even then, you had no idea who I was?"

Lifepaw once again shook her head.

"Patchfur changed after your mother's death. Perhaps you remind him of your mother too much."

"Well, hanging out with my mother's mother and siblings wouldn't help, would it?"

"Well, no, but you should keep those bonds strong. Maybe I'll take you to the elder's den sometime to visit Patchfur's parents. You could probably meet Jayfur, our brother, too. You know Shinypelt's family well, but I think it's important to meet the families of both cats you came from."

"Thanks," Lifepaw grinned, padding back towards camp.

Chapter 29

Salmon awoke early in the morning, the sun not yet risen. Since the arrival of spring, Salmon had been traveling to the cherry blossom tree where her mother had been buried every day, hoping to see tiny pink blossoms bloom on the thin branches of the tree.

Yet, every day, the branches remained bare, not the slightest bit of vegetation growing from it. Salmon knew it would grow. She knew it had grown in the past, and she knew it would grow with her mother.

After all, Salmon had been raised hearing stories of cats that had become presents in the natural things they had been named after. Salmon already was aware that at her death (which she hoped would be many many moons from now) she would be swimming in the river as a salmon in the summer.

Salmon brushed past some fresh-growing grass, sniffing the cold air. It might've been spring but the morning air was still cold, as well as the night. Once summer arrived, however, they'd be trapped in eternal heat. At least the trees would be fully bloomed.

The sun was just rising above the hill as Salmon came towards the tree, padding over rocks and pebbles, pricking her ears in case she heard any type of prey.

The sun's rays were just beginning to shine when she was the tree. The golden rays of the sun illuminated the pale trunk, causing it to shimmer.

Salmon become overwhelmed with beauty, nearly kneeling before the tree. She knew her mother was here. She could feel it.

She walked forward, her heart pounding. As she approached the tree, she found morning dew on the grass below it, as if her mother had passed over. And with a gasp, she glanced up, noticing the tiny green encased-blossoms that had not been there before.

Of course, there were no bright and blooming pink flowers, but the tree was regaining its beautiful leaves. Cherry Blossom's presence was here. There was no doubt about it.

"Mother," Salmon breathed, sinking her paws into the damp ground. "I'm glad you have returned to us. It's been such a long winter, looking at this bare tree. But it's growing, and I know, surely, that you are present."

Salmon paused, almost expecting a response, but none came. She knew, of course, that no response would come. Still, she had almost hoped to hear the sweet sound of her mother's voice.

Her mother might have died moons prior, but Salmon could still recall her sweet voice, her gentle tongue, her warm smile.

She had heard stories of cats that has spoken through their natural artifacts. She supposed it was only a kitten's tale though, not meant to be taken seriously in any form. But what if it was true? What if her mother could appear to her?

Salmon vowed at that moment to continue visiting each morning to see the blooming of one of the magnificent cherry blossom trees in the forest.

"Salmon! Salmon! Are you out here?" came a squeaky voice.

Salmon turned, noticing the tiny Mouse near the edge of a tall pine tree, glancing around curiously.

"Oh, yes, I'm here!" Salmon called.

Mouse stepped out from the tree, glancing up at the cherry blossom tree.

"Oh. Oak guessed you'd be here. I've been hearing how you've been sneaking out early every day. I guess I didn't realize you were coming here each day. Don't you need more sleep, Salmon?"

"I think I get too much," Salmon admitted, laughing.

"Hm..." Mouse muttered, gazing at the tree. "That tree still hasn't

bloomed?"

"Yes, it has!" Salmon exclaimed, her paws tingling. "Come closer."

Mouse obeyed, stepping forward to get a better glance at the tree. She tilted her head and squinted her eyes, as if she could not see the growing tree at all.

"It's barely growing," she mumbled.

Salmon frowned. She knew Mouse wasn't trying to hurt her feelings, but it still hurt to know that Salmon could see what Mouse could not, and that was a healthy growing tree.

"Anyway, Oak told me to find you. You're training with Honey and me today."

"Please tell me Storm isn't joining," Salmon groaned.

"Of course not," Mouse assured her. "He may be my brother, but he annoys me as much as you. He's full of so much pride. You'd think he's the best cat in this tribe. Anyway, follow me!" Mouse called, leading her further into the forest.

Salmon followed behind, her stomach grumbling. She hadn't been able to get anything to eat on her way out, leaving her once again hungry in the morning. She guessed she'd be able to catch a mouse or something to keep her stomach satisfied.

Oak sat near an old stump, accompanied by Honey, her mentor, and Mouse's mentor.

"There you are, Salmon!" Oak exclaimed. "Where were you?"

Mouse answered for her. "Where she normally is, Oak!"

"I'm sorry, Father. The cherry blossom tree is growing," Salmon explained.

Oak let out a faint smile. The subject of his mate's death was still quite hard for him.

"Ah, is it? I've seen that tree grow for many years. It gets more and more beautiful each year," he explained, a warm smile on his face. It was at that moment that Salmon could notice the gray hairs on his muzzle, the tension in his muscles, and the fatigue he often showed. She knew her father was not the spry young tom he had once been. She guessed she hadn't realized how old he actually was.

Salmon opened her mouth to speak, but she was cut off by Oak.

"Let's go," he declared, quickly dismissing the subject. Salmon frowned, once again, but she knew it was her fault for talking about such a delicate subject with her father.

"I didn't even hear you get up this morning," Honey admitted as they padded through the forest. "You've become quite quiet."

"Well, Oak said I was light on my paws. I wonder if Cherry Blossom was quiet too."

"Why don't you ask?" Mouse suggested.

Salmon shook her head, whispering, "He's already been through one of those talks today. We...we don't really talk about her that much anymore."

"But that's insane!" Mouse exclaimed.

Her mentor turned around, shooting her a glance.

"Mouse, quiet down or you'll scare all the prey!" her mentor, an older black she-cat, hissed.

"Sorry, Night," she murmured, turning back to Salmon.

"What do you and your father even talk about?" Mouse asked.

"The weather, the training. It's usually just about the future, like when I'll be leader."

"You will be leader?" Honey asked.

"Of course," Salmon replied. "I'm his only direct kin. Of course, I'm

sure Storm would find some great great great grandfather's uncle twice removed to get me out."

"Eh, just ignore him," Mouse noted. "But, if Oak were to get another mate and kits, would they replace you?"

Salmon paused, not even thinking about the subject. "It depends. If a tom is born, I guess so. But Oak is old, and he hasn't moved passed my mother. I know he won't."

"Girls, it's time to work!" Oak called, interrupting their conversation.

"Bother!" Honey spat.

"Honey, your job is to knock Salmon off her feet. Salmon, try to dodge, or counterattack. Sound good?"

"I guess," Honey muttered as Salmon nodded in agreement.

Salmon stood, her feet firm and her back arched as Honey padded towards her slowly. All at once, Honey lashed at her, a paw swiping at her feet. Salmon quickly knocked her aside, still firm.

"Mouse, go!" Oak called.

Mouse came forward this time, springing at Salmon suddenly. Taken aback, Salmon fell over, and Mouse seized the opportunity, holding Salmon down with her tiny gray paws. Though she was small, Salmon had to admit, she was strong.

Quickly thinking, Salmon pawed at her underbelly, causing Mouse to let go. Then, Salmon swiped at her paws, causing Mouse to hit the floor with a thud.

"Ouch!" Mouse muttered, standing back up and wiping dirt off of her.

Cats were giving her odd looks. Salmon turned around, confused, to look at her father. Then she turned back to Mouse.

"Are you okay?" Salmon asked.

"I'm fine," Mouse replied. "That was..."

"Amazing," Oak interrupted. "I'm surprised, Salmon. We haven't taught too much fighting to you yet, and you were able to pull off moves that...that we don't normally see. In fact, I-I've only seen clan cats perform that move."

"Clan cats?" Salmon asked. She'd never actually seen one in real life, but she'd often heard the stories of the ones that lived in the woods.

"Yes. Wonder where you got that idea to move like that. It's odd your brain would be wired like a clan cat. We often only fight with wild animals around here, remaining isolated from other cats. Ha, but you're one of us and through and through. Perhaps you're just a bit smarter than us."

Salmon laughed, though she was concerned. How had she come up with a move that others barely used? Was it just intellect? Or was their reason behind it?

Ignoring her fabulous incident, she continued working with Honey and Mouse, switching places every so often. She found Mouse was easy to knock over, but Honey, however, was a challenge. For the rest of the morning, they worked like this in a strenuous pattern.

By the time Oak called for a break, Salmon was exhausted, and hungry. She ate with Honey and Mouse near the dens, eating a full rabbit and mouse.

"Wow, you sure are hungry!" Honey observed.

"I didn't get a snack this morning."

"Maybe it's all her clan cat moves," Mouse snickered.

"Clan cat?" came a sudden call.

Salmon rolled her rue yes, immediately recognizing the voice. Storm stood, his head tilted.

"Yeah, brother. She was able to pull off this wicked move during practice today. Oak said he's only seen clan cats do it."

"Hm," Storm muttered, gazing at Salmon. "If you ask me, I'd say that Salmon is so different she's better as a clan cat. Maybe you're not one of us."

Salmon growled as he padded away, his nose stuck-up in the air in an annoying fashion.

"Ignore him. You're better than those clan cats. You'll be a great leader," Mouse purred.

"Thanks," Salmon grumbled. Practice ended in the evening, leaving Salmon to spend the rest of her evening near the cherry blossom tree. She hoped to hear her mother's words, but no sound escaped the tree, causing Salmon to return to the dens in defeat.

Tired from a long day, she crawled into the apprentice den, resting her head on the soft mat. Slowly, she fell asleep, dreams of her mother circling her head.

Chapter 30

"Make sure that moss is nice and dry!" Firelight snapped at Lemonpaw. She rolled her eyes, squeezing water out of the moss and onto the forest floor.

Another moon of training, and Firelight hadn't gotten any better with her. Coming to training was an absolute torture each day. She was this close to talking to Silverstar about finding her another mentor.

It wasn't that Firelight's training methods were bad. In fact, she'd learned a lot about fighting and hunting. It seemed like he could get along with every other cat except her, and she wasn't sure why.

"Is this good?" Lemonpaw asked.

Firelight eyed the moss she had gathered, then hesitantly placed his paw on the moss.

"There's still some water in there. Keep trying," he instructed, refusing to make eye contact with her.

Lemonpaw rolled her eyes, continuing to pump water out of the moss. She did this for a few more minutes, then handed it towards Firelight again.

"Better," he grumbled. "Come on. Let's head back to camp."

Relieved her day of training was over, Lemonpaw picked the moss up in her mouth, padding back with Firelight to camp. They remained quiet the entire way there, making an awkward situation.

"Go ahead and switch out the nests when you get back to camp," Firelight spoke at last. "And get a good night's rest for

tomorrow."

"What's tomorrow?" Lemonpaw asked.

"More fighting styles."

"Okay," said Lemonpaw, padding into the NightClan camp with Firelight. The tom immediately strode off to the side, leaving Lemonpaw in camp. She padded into the elders den, still clutching her mouthful of moss.

She found Raspberrypaw and Thymepaw seated next to Bluefur, chatting away.

"Bluefur, I've got you some more moss!" Lemonpaw called.

"Thank you," the she-cat purred, handing Lemonpaw her old, dry nest.

"Did I miss a lesson?" Lemonpaw asked, glancing at Raspberrypaw and Thymepaw.

"Oh, no, we were just talking," Raspberrypaw explained.

Thymepaw nodded beside her.

"Oh..." Lemonpaw replied, glancing up at Thymepaw once again. Something had changed between them over the past moon. They were still good friends, him being one of her best friends, but she had grown a crush on him. Now, she became nervous each time she saw him, and butterflies fluttered in her stomach. She had only realized a day before that she loved him.

Lemonpaw wasn't sure how it had all happened. She and Thymepaw had been friends for so long, she never expected to fall for the tom someday. They had been sharing a mouse the day before, chatting together (or signing, for that matter), when Lemonpaw had locked eyes with him for a brief moment, butterflies flooding her stomach. She had thought back to all the moments they had shared together, and in that brief moment, she realized she loved the tom as more than a friend.

"Firelight still giving you troubles?" Raspberrypaw asked, breaking off Lemonpaw's thoughts.

"Oh, he's not that bad," Lemonpaw admitted, though she thought otherwise as she handed out the rest of the moss to the elders.

"Are you going to Frostflight's kits' ceremony tomorrow?" Bluefur asked.

Lemonpaw gasped, dropping the moss at her feet. "I totally forgot! They become apprentices tomorrow?"

Bluefur nodded. "Oh, yes. They came to visit Poppyfur this afternoon and were talking all about it and how they would get to train with their big sister. I've heard you've been visiting less and less."

"Oh, yes, well, I've been so exhausted after training, I haven't gotten around to it," Lemonpaw admitted. "But I'll visit tonight. I'm sure they'd like that."

"I'll come with you," Raspberrypaw offered.

"Me too," Thymepaw signed.

"Thymepaw, do-do you want to go on a walk?" Lemonpaw asked.

"Ooh, I'll come too!" Raspberrypaw exclaimed.

"Oh, well..." Lemonpaw began, only to be cut off by Bluefur.

"Perhaps you leave them alone. Raspberrypaw, we can go over some new signs that you're struggling with. Didn't you think Thymepaw was asking for water when he was discussing hunting yesterday?"

"Oh, well...I suppose," Raspberrypaw agreed, embarassed.

"We'll meet up with you later," Thymepaw signed, exiting with Lemonpaw.

"Great. So, let's go!" she exclaimed, rushing into the woods. Thymepaw rushed after her, grinning.

She still longed to hear his voice that she had not heard since she was a young kit, but she knew Thymepaw's existence was a gift. He could've died that day.

No cat really spoke about Thymepaw's muteness, though Lemonpaw wondered on a daily basis whether his ability to speak would ever return.

"How's training?" Lemonpaw asked.

Thymepaw began moving his paws, explaining how he'd caught a squirrel and a mouse.

"That's great. I've been okay at hunting. Firelight says I'm better at fighting."

Thymepaw shook his head, telling her she was a good hunter.

"Thanks," she grinned, stopping in a clearing where the new-leaf sun shined perfectly down through them.

The weather had gotten hotter, and Lemonpaw was aware that it would be green-leaf in a fairly short time.

"Nice weather," she admitted.

Thymepaw nodded next to her.

Lemonpaw gazed down awkwardly, wanting to tell Thymepaw everything, the truth, but she couldn't. How could she love a tom who couldn't even tell her he loved her back?

Trying to break up the tension, she shoved Thymepaw with her paw, giggling.

Thymepaw narrowed his eyes and pounced at her, causing Lemonpaw to laugh. Together, they pounced around like they had in the nursery when they were kits.

They giggled and laughed until they had collapsed next to each other out of breath and laughing.

Lemonpaw gazed up at the sunset now, admiring the waves of orange and pink that made the sky look lovely.

"Pretty sunset," Lemonpaw observed.

Thymepaw nodded next to her, then raised his paw, as if he were about to sign something. Then, he put it down, as if he'd changed his mind.

"Well, we should head back then," Lemonpaw told him, sad that their fun moment was over. She stood up, Thymepaw standing beside her. He'd grown since they were kits, towering over Lemonpaw now. He wasn't the biggest apprentice, but considering Lemonpaw's small size, he had grown into a large tom.

Together, they padded back to camp, finding Raspberrypaw waiting impatiently near the nursery.

"That was a long walk," Raspberrypaw noted. "I told Frostflight and the kits you'd visit ages ago."

"It wasn't that long," Lemonpaw admitted, feeling guilty.

"Lemonpaw, is that you?" came Frostflight's sweet voice.

"Frostflight!" Lemonpaw exclaimed, rushing into the nursery. The small gray she-cat stood with her four kits, grinning.

"Lemonpaw!" the four kits exclaimed, bouncing beside her.

"Hi, kits! Sorry I've been gone so long," Lemonpaw admitted, turning back to Frostflight.

"We know you're busy," Frostflight purred. "Soon, the kits will be sleeping in the same den as you."

"But I'll still see you and Hailfrost, won't I?" Lemonpaw asked.

"Of course," Frostflight purred.

"Lemonpaw, we're apprentices tomorrow!" Spotkit squeaked.

"I know! I can't wait for you to train! Raspberrypaw and Thymepaw are here to play with you guys one more time before you leave the nursery."

"Sweet!" Desertkit exclaimed.

Grinning, the three friends played with Lemonpaw's younger siblings, laughing and giggling and having a good time. It reminded Lemonpaw of her days back in the nursery. Oh, how she wished she was back there instead of training with stuck-up, old Firelight.

"Who do you think our mentors will be?" Pearkit asked curiously.

"I don't know," Lemonpaw admitted.

"Don't worry. Silverstar will choose someone great. She always does," Raspberrypaw told them, glancing at Lemonpaw. Lemonpaw rolled her eyes, knowing she was making fun of Lemonpaw's terrible mentor.

As the sky turned completely dark, Lemonpaw waved goodbye to Frostflight and the kits, promising to see them at the ceremony that would take place the following day. Yawning, she followed Raspberrypaw and Thymepaw into the apprentice den where she fell asleep.

Lemonpaw was awoken the following morning by Thymepaw repeatedly poking her with his tail.

"What?" she groaned, opening her eyes.

Thymepaw signed, "Get up now."

"Why? Five more minutes."

"Lemonpaw, the ceremony is starting!" Raspberrypaw shrieked.

Lemonpaw immediately stood up, rushing out of the apprentice den. The four kits were already perched at the top of the rock, relieved to see Lemonpaw arrive. She found Frostflight and Hailfrost in the crowd and sat beside them.

"Where were you?" Hailfrost asked.

"Asleep," Lemonpaw admitted.

"Don't worry. Silverstar's only just begun," Frostflight whispered.

"Welcome, NightClan! Today, we come to welcome four new apprentices into our clan! Pearkit, Desertkit, Troutkit, and Spotkit are six moons old, which means they are ready to become apprentices."

A cheer sounded through the camp, and the four stood, gazing down at the clan.

"Pearkit, from this day forward, until you receive your warrior name, you shall be called Pearpaw," Silverstar spoke, gazing at the tabby she-cat.

"Cherryshine," Silverstar called.

Lemonpaw turned, watching as the black and white she-cat came forward.

"You are strong and skilled. Please, teach this onto Pearpaw," Silverstar said.

"I shall," Cherryshine replied, dipping her head. Lemonpaw watched with excitement as Pearpaw rushed down the rock to touch noses with her new mentor.

The ceremony continued on as the other three were deemed and apprentices and received mentors of their own. Then, as they were all named, the clan burst out, shouting,

"PEARPAW! DESERTPAW! TROUTPAW! SPOTPAW!"

Lemonpaw shouted with them, gazing at the four apprentices. Even though they weren't related to her, even though Frostflight and Hailfrost weren't her parents, she realized this was her family, and she was glad to be apart of such a great family.

The crowd began to split apart, and Lemonpaw could already see Firelight waiting impatiently near the border of the camp for her to join him.

"Guys!" Lemonpaw called, gazing at the four apprentices that sat near each other.

"Did you see us up there, Lemonpaw?" Desertpaw asked excitedly.

"You were awesome!" Lemonpaw exclaimed. "I wish I could stay and talk longer, but Firelight'll have my pelt if I don't get out there. Have a great first day!"

"Bye, Lemonpaw!" Troutpaw called, waving her tail. The three others joined, and Lemonpaw gazed back, smiling at the young apprentices.

Chapter 31

It was a beautiful spring day, and Sunrise sat perched on the windowsill, allowing the warm sun to warm her back. She purred as she rested, thankful for a relaxing day. From afar, she could hear the distant mews of Holly and Polly, who were fighting over a toy.

Sunrise turned, glancing at her two sisters. They both struggled to leap, their bellies holding them down. They had been taken to the vet a week before, and since they were deemed overweight, Sunrise had enjoyed watching them groan and complain over their smaller meals and forced exercise.

Unfortunately, now that Holly and Polly sat outside for one hour each day, Sunrise had limited time with Fawn, whom the two didn't know about.

Sunrise and Fawn had continued visiting Anna, listening to her stories, chatting about their days. Sometimes, Fawn would vaguely mention a dream, though most of the time she told her dreams in secret to Anna.

Sunrise hoped the old she-cat wasn't coming between her and her friend, though she'd gotten a bit jealous lately being shoved off to the side while they chatted for what seemed like an eternity.

Assuming Holly and Polly wouldn't be forced outside for awhile, Sunrise leapt down from the windowsill and padded out the cat door, the warm spring sun immediately shining on her white and gold pelt.

She sat outside for a few moments, watching bees buzz by her nose and sniffing the flowers that had grown. Soon, it would be summer, a season Sunrise had only heard about since she'd been born in the fall.

Sunrise sat, gazing around the lively backyard. She licked

one of her paws and flicked an ear, watching two robins soar across the sky and land in a nearby oak tree.

"I bet I can climb that tree," Sunrise whispered, assuming she could catch the robins.

Slowly, she padded across the backyard and leapt onto the fence, gazing at the oak tree that sat in the neighbor's yard. With much inspiration, she pushed off the fencepost and leapt, sinking her claws into the bark. Slowly, she scrambled up the tree, attempting not to lose balance.

Unfortunately, she created quite a bit of noise, causing the birds to quickly flee the try.

"Darn it!" she shouted, pulling herself up onto a branch and knocking leaves down below.

"Sunrise?" came a familiar voice.

Sunrise froze, then gazed down at the ground. Fawn stood at the bottom of the tree, a confused look glued to her face.

"Oh, hey, Fawn!" Sunrise called.

"Sunrise, what are yo doing?" Fawn asked.

"Well, there were these birds see, and—"

"I don't want to hear it," Fawn responded quickly. "Come on! Let's go to Anna's! She wants to tell us something."

"You mean she wants to tell you something?" Sunrise asked.

"No, she said you can come too. Now, get down from the tree and come on!" Fawn called excitedly.

Sunrise quickly picked up her excitement and found her way down, meeting Fawn on top of the fence post. Together, they walked along the line of fences towards Anna's house.

"What's she going to tell us?" Sunrise wondered.

"No idea," Fawn replied. "Come on!" she called, picking up the pace.

Sunrise quickly followed behind her until they came to Anna's backyard. The old she-cat sat curled up on the porch, her tail hanging over her nose as she slept.

"Anna!" Fawn called, leaping down the fence.

The she-cat's eyes opened and she glanced around quickly, relaxing her muscles once she saw the two.

"Oh, Fawn, Sunset, it's you."

"Sunrise," she corrected her.

"That's what I said," Anna muttered, standing up and stretching her old muscles.

"What did you want to tell us about?" Fawn asked impatiently.

Sunrise stood by her side, eagerly awaiting Anna's response.

"Oh...yes, that," Anna nodded.

The two again waited as Anna sat quietly.

"So, what were you telling us?"

"Oh!" Anna shouted. "Oh, yes! Now I remember. Come, sit."

Sunrise and Fawn both padded forward, sitting across from the two.

"Wow, you two have grown the past couple of moons," Anna observed.

"Get to the point," Sunrise muttered.

"Sunrise!" Fawn gasped.

"Sorry. My old mind seems to leave quickly. Now, what was

I going to tell you?" Anna asked, pondering. Her eyes lit up suddenly, and she nodded. "Ah, yes. I do tend to get a bit tired after my naps, you know. I meant to tell you about the new tom who moved in next door."

"New tom?" Fawn asked, suddenly interested. Sunrise exchanged an excited glance with her.

"Yes, yes, I introduced myself to him this morning. We talked for a little, especially about our pasts. His name is Frog. He's a former clan cat."

"A former clan cat!" Sunrise gasped. Fawn shrunk down a little, as if she were frightened by this.

"Oh, yes. He told me a lot about how he left his clan."

"Why'd he leave?" Sunrise asked.

"I suppose you could ask him yourself," Anna purred. "Fawn, dear, is everything okay?"

"Will he know of the dreams?" Fawn asked.

"Pardon?"

"Maybe he knows what my dreams mean," Fawn suggested.

"I don't know. He seems to have traveled a bit far," Anna explained.

"Can we meet him?" Sunrise asked.

"To the left," Anna explained, pointing her tail.

Sunrise quickly padded forward, Fawn slowly following behind. Sunrise then leapt up the fence, gazing down at the backyard below. Immediately, she came face to face with two dogs that barked loudly and leapt up at the fence.

Sunrise shrieked, as did Fawn. Two humans yelled sharply, and the dogs retreated and padded inside.

"Darn dogs!" an old groan came.

Sunrise turned and noticed that in the corner of the backyard was an older dark brown tabby tom whose muzzle had grayed.

"Um, hello?" Sunrise called.

The tom pricked his ears and glanced up.

"How many kittypets are in this neighborhood?" he asked.

"Pardon, sir," Fawn called. "We've only come to introduce ourselves."

"Then do so," he muttered, rising and padding forward to greet them. Sunrise leapt down the fence, Fawn following behind her.

"I'm Sunrise," she said, staring at the old tom.

"And I'm Fawn," Fawn explained.

"Uh huh. Well nice to meet you," the tom grumbled, refusing to make eye contact with them.

"Aren't you going to introduce yourself?" Sunrise asked.

"I'm Frog. Any more questions?"

"We heard you were a clan cat!" Sunrise blurted.

Frog narrowed his eyes and growled quietly. "Who told you that? Was it that other she-cat?"

"Yes, Anna told us," Sunrise explained.

"I was a clan cat, but I'm retired now," Frog snapped.

"Retired? Clan cats retire?"

"Sunrise, maybe we shouldn't," Fawn began, but Frog had only gotten into a worse mood.

"You stupid kittypets and your stupid minds drifting about clan life."

"Kittypet?" Sunrise asked.

"You're just as dull as the others back home. It's what clan cats call a house cat," Frog growled. He turned to pad away, and Sunrise could notice faint scars on one of his legs.

"What are those scars from?"

"You're a bit rude, aren't you?!" Frog hissed.

"Sunrise, we should go," Fawn whispered.

"Please, I don't mean to be rude," Sunrise begged. "We both have connections to clan cats. Or, well, Fawn does. I'm just interested in them."

"Connections, you say?" Frog asked, turning back around.

"Tell him, Fawn!"

"I don't think..." Fawn began, but Frog was now waiting impatiently.

"I have dreams...from StarClan," Fawn said quietly.

"StarClan? Is it even possible? A kittypet!"

"They're possible!" Sunrise urged.

"I see cats. I mean, when I was younger, I would only see faint cats. But now, I see patrols, fights, apprentices in training. No cat has spoken to me, but StarClan has given me this ability. I know I'm only a kittypet, and I don't know why I was chosen."

"StarClan's odd, isn't it?" Frog asked, eyeing Fawn. "They like prophecies. Know any?"

Fawn shook her head.

"Hmph. A bit odd, but maybe it is for a prophecy. And you,"

he said, turning his gaze to Sunrise. "You have sharp claws, strong muscles. You're not a clan cat, are you?"

"No. I was born a kittypet."

"You sure look like you could be one, but maybe you need a few scars first," Frog grumbled.

"Really?"

"Well, besides that collar on your neck, I'd say you could join one," he wheezed, laughing. "Not that you would ever survive."

"And why aren't you in your clan?" Fawn asked, annoyed.

"That's none of your business, now is it?"

"But Anna said—" Sunrise argued.

"Anna said what? That I'd tell you my backstory."

"Please, maybe it'll help me understand," Fawn begged. "Maybe I'm having visions of your clan."

"My clan? I highly doubt it. I hear there are clans around here. Know their names?"

"No," they both responded honestly.

"Please. We'll never bother you again!" Sunrise urged.

Frog rolled his eyes and sat down.

"Well, sit!" he snapped.

The two obeyed and sat before him, gazing at the old tom.

"I lived in a clan far, far away from here, mind you. I was raised a clan cat, born a clan cat, trained to be a clan cat. I was in many fights, many battles, and our clan constantly struggled with territorial rogues. And then these fights progressed, I got more tired, my muscles got sorer, and I nearly died in the last battle I was in. I'd had enough of this way of life. They called me a traitor, but I

ignored them and left. I lived on my own, tired, hungry. Some two-legs found me on the road and brought me to a shelter where I wasn't adopted for another thirty-or-so moons. That's nearly three years in your talk, kittypets. And then I came here, and I don't miss clan life. It's too competitive, too dangerous, and stupid," he growled.

"But didn't you have a family?"

Frog laughed at this. "No. My clan was anything but family. I never enjoyed the life of a clan cat, and I find a kittypet is more relaxing in my old age. Would I go back? Maybe if I were younger, but I am old, tired, and wish to rest. Now, if you excuse me, I've told my story and you two can leave me alone."

"But, Frog!" Sunrise called.

"You promised," he muttered, padding away.

"That was interesting," Fawn murmured as they leapt back over the fence.

Sunrise nodded, glancing back over at the now-asleep old tom. She only wished she could hear more about clan life.

Chapter 32

"Pst, Lifepaw," came a hushed whisper.

Lifepaw slowly opened her eyes, bright sunlight flooding over her. The entire apprentice den was warmed by the gentle glow of sun, and she yawned, focusing now on Goosepaw.

"What?" she murmured, half-awake.

"Everyone's up. Remember our mentors gave us the day off today? You don't want to sleep through the entire day," Goosepaw explained.

Lifepaw's eyes shot open and she stood up too suddenly, spots clouding her vision. Once she was able to see again, she grinned, watching as other apprentices went off with their mentors. She was thankful that Tinypelt had given her the day off today after a long day of training the day before. Thankfully, Goosepaw had gotten the day off too after getting a thorn stuck in his paw the day prior.

Lifepaw's training had only progressed, and she had become skilled in both hunting and fighting. Several cats had remarked how she'd trained just like her mother. If only Lifepaw had known her mother...

Soon, she would be a warrior. It would only be about two moons. Lifepaw's paws pringled at the very thought of standing on top of the rock with Thornstar, receiving her warrior name.

"Lifepaw," came Goosepaw's call.

Lifepaw turned, forgetting he had been standing there.

"Sorry. Want to share a mouse?" she asked.

Goosepaw nodded, and together, they padded to the fresh-kill pile, grinning. Picking out the plumpest mouse, Lifepaw sat

across from the tom and took a large bite, licking her lips in satisfaction.

With the new arrival of green-leaf, prey had been plentiful, and the whole clan had been gaining back the lost weight from leaf-bare. Cats were healthy, queens had given birth to new kits, and the whole clan seemed to be in a good mood.

From the distance, Lifepaw could make out her father going on patrol. Patchfur would often mutter good morning and wish her a nice day when he saw her, but that was it. Meanwhile, Lifepaw would watch as Goosepaw and his siblings went and visited Blueocean often. Lifepaw's heart often sank at this.

Of course, some days she'd visit Mousestripe, though the she-cat was usually chatting with her mate, Thornstar. She'd try to visit Stormpelt and Graytail too, though Stormnight was preoccupied with caring for his mate and their newly born kits, and Graytail was busy with his newfound mate as well.

But as Lifepaw gazed at Goosepaw, she knew she had friends, and though her family seemed more important, she knew her friends would not let her down.

"Is your paw feeling better?" Lifepaw asked Goosepaw.

He nodded vigourously, finishing off the last bit of the plump mouse. Lifepaw grinned, smiling at Goosepaw.

Ever since he'd become an apprentice, she had felt different around the tom. She felt closer to him than Ripplepaw and Marshpaw. Of course she still spent time with them, though she often felt she wanted to be alone with Goosepaw.

Sometimes, when she'd hear of her family members and their mates, she would think of her future, Goosepaw often coming to mind. Perhaps it was only a silly daydream.

"How's training?" Goosepaw asked.

"Tinypelt taught me a lot of moves yesterday," Lifepaw explained. "My back legs are incredibly sore today."

"Thank StarClan she gave you the day off then," he replied, laughing.

Lifepaw nodded, her smile wide.

"I haven't talked to Ripplepaw all this week. How's her training going?" Lifepaw asked.

"Ah, herbs and such," Goosepaw replied. "Boring, pretty much. Hey, you want to go on a walk? I know we get the day off, but it's pretty boring here in camp."

"Sure," Lifepaw responded, rising and walking with him towards the edge of camp.

"Hey, Goosepaw!" Pinethorn called as he returned from a patrol.

"Morning, Dad!" Goosepaw called.

Lifepaw watched, her heart sinking. Goosepaw turned away from his father, noticing Lifepaw's sorrow.

"Are you all right?" he asked Lifepaw.

"Fine," Lifepaw quickly replied. "Maybe there will be some plump rabbits in the woods today ready for us to catch."

Goosepaw nodded. "I bet I can catch more than you."

"No, you can't!" Lifepaw shouted.

"Sure, you may be farther in training, but I guess we'll see who's the better hunter," Goosepaw challenged.

"Challenge accepted," Lifepaw agreed.

Her mind off her father, Lifepaw crept with Goosepaw along the woods, her ears pricked for any sign of prey. Suddenly, Goosepaw twitched and crouched down. Before he could pounce, however, Lifepaw stepped on his tail, causing him to fail in his leap.

A rabbit hopped into its burrow, and Goosepaw moaned in defeat.

"Hey, who said you could do that?" he asked, shoving Lifepaw.

Lifepaw laughed, moving her tail away as he tried to hold hers down.

"Can't catch me!" she shouted, beginning to rush through the woods.

Goosepaw laughed behind her, chasing after her. Though he was younger than her, he was taller than her and faster, and soon enough, he leapt onto her. Lifepaw gasped, falling into the grass with him and laughing.

Laying on their backs, the two friends laughed with each other, out of breath.

"So much for a big challenge, huh?" Lifepaw asked.

"Yeah," Goosepaw replied.

They quieted down, listening to the sound of honeybees buzz by. A songbird called up ahead, and the warm rays of the sun warmed Lifepaw's pelt.

"Pretty day," Lifepaw admitted.

"Is everything all right?" Goosepaw asked again.

"Why do you keep asking me that?" Lifepaw demanded, upset.

Goosepaw, taken aback, stood up. "I-I'm worried about you, that's all.

"Worried? You shouldn't be. I'm fine," Lifepaw urged, standing up to face him.

"Come on, Lifepaw. Both you and I know something's up. I

see the way you look at your father. You barely speak to him. You don't even talk much about Mousestripe and Stormnight and Graytail anymore."

"They're busy. They're warriors. They have jobs to do," Lifepaw replied quietly. "They don't need me rushing after them. I'm not a kit anymore."

"Just because you're not a kit doesn't mean you don't have time to see your family. My siblings and I couldn't be closer, and we visit Blueocean often. Pinethorn we don't talk too as much, but he's still there to support us."

"Well, I haven't got siblings and my mother's dead," Lifepaw growled, holding back tears.

Goosepaw fell silent. Lifepaw sensed he was unsure on how to reply.

"Your mother's in StarClan," Goosepaw replied quietly.

"So?! She left me, Goosepaw! Right after I was born, she died, knowing she had a young kit to look after! All I hear these days is 'You look so much like your mother' or 'Your mother would be proud' or even 'Shinypelt said or did the exact same thing'. Well, where is Shinypelt? I haven't sensed her presence at all my entire *life*! All these cats talk about how great she was, and then I see you, and your siblings with Blueocean, and I think 'Why couldn't I have a mother? Why did I only get an ignorant father and cats that barely cared about me?'"

"Lifepaw, you know that's not true."

Lifepaw frowned, sitting down. She quietly wept, feeling Goosepaw's tail wrap around her shoulder.

"I know, I know. I've been avoiding Mousestripe, Stormnight, and Graytail because...I feel like they don't need me anymore."

"Of course they need you. Patchfur does too. Blueocean told me Patchfur's always been a good warrior. He still loves you.

And...your mother. Well, Shinypelt is still here with you. She's in you, Lifepaw. I bet she's watching from StarClan right now," Goosepaw assured her.

"You think so?" Lifepaw asked.

Goosepaw nodded. "I bet she never meant to leave you. Serving SnowClan was her decision. I've heard she was a hero in battle. That should make you proud of her."

"Thanks, Goosepaw," Lifepaw purred, glad to have him at her side.

"And...your friends are here for you too," Goosepaw spoke. Stammering, he muttered, "And I-I'm here for you...too. You-you think cats don't need you, but I-I do, Lifepaw. I need you. I-I love you, Lifepaw."

Lifepaw froze, gazing up at Goosepaw. Goosepaw immediately cringed and turned away, embarassed.

"Uh, forget that last part," he muttered.

Lifepaw laughed, walking along to the other side of him. Smiling, she purred, "I love you too, Goosepaw."

"You-you do?" he asked.

Lifepaw laughed and nodded. "I've kind of had a teensy crush on you since I was younger."

Goosepaw laughed, then smiled, nuzzling Lifepaw. Lifepaw grinned, glad to have not only friends and family who loved her, but a cat who loved her more than a friend.

Sad to break up their moment, Lifepaw looked up. "We should head back. Maybe Ripplepaw will want to take a break."

Goosepaw nodded, still grinning.

Together, they headed back to camp in silence, their tails intertwined as they smiled at each other with loving grins.

Chapter 33

With only two months left until she was declared a full member of the tribe, Salmon awoke with excitement, prepared for another day training with her father.

In her months of training, she had worked hard with her father, learning valuable fighting and hunting skills. Her father had become amazed with her ability to quickly adapt to new styles of hunting and fighting, and often he praised her and let her know what a great leader she would become. Salmon would smile and work harder, glad to be pleasing her father and hoping her mother was proud of her too.

The sun was just rising above the hill when Salmon crept out of the den. She quickly made her way further into the woods where the cherry blossom tree sat, along with the resting body of her mother.

With spring's arrival, blossoms had finally begun to bloom. Pink flowers grew from pale branches, and each day, Salmon continued visiting the tree, watching as it continued to bloom and grow, reminding her faintly of her mother's beauty.

It was hard to remember her mother since she had died when Salmon was young. Yet still, Salmon remembered her gentle lick and purr, her soft voice and caring words. Why was it that she had to die so soon?

Salmon approached the tree, sitting down across from it. The sun had just begun to lift above the hill, its golden rays shining on the pale pink blossoms that sprouted from the branches. Salmon watched in amazement as the pink flowers shone brightly in the sunlight.

"Mother, I don't know if you can hear me," Salmon admitted. "I mean, I've heard that some cats have spoken from their natural names. They're kit tales, of course. I don't mean to doubt

what we believe. Oh, what I'm saying is, I've missed you, and I hope you've continued to watch over me. Your blossoms have nearly bloomed completely. Soon, this tree will be a beauty for all. I miss you, Mommy. I hope you're proud of me."

With those words, Salmon hung her head down and sat in silence a few moments, as if she could feel her mother's spirit passing onto her. Of course, no words were spoken, and the tree only swayed in the light wind. Salmon knew she was stupid for believing in kit's tales. If only her mother had explained those last words to her.

The last words. Salmon had seemingly forgotten them over the months. While memories of her mother faded, she realized she had not forgotten the haunting words her mother had spoken to her.

You are not the kit everyone thinks you are, the words repeated. Salmon shuddered and decided to forget the sentence, retreating back to the dens in silence.

She found her father waiting patiently by a large pine tree, grinning at Salmon.

"How is the tree looking?" he asked Salmon.

Salmon grinned, then nodded, not wishing to explain anymore. She knew Oak would occasionally visit his past-mate's tree, but he did not often. Cherry Blossom's death had taken a toll on him, she remembered. She had fond memories of Oak as strong and gentle. Now, he seemed years older with a graying muzzle and old eyes. Her death had aged him. As for Salmon, it seemed to allow her to grow stronger.

"What's the plan for today?" Salmon asked, chewing a mouse that Oak had saved for her.

"You're fighting against the others today," Oak explained.

Salmon nodded, knowing this was a common practice. Honey and Mouse often practiced with each other, Salmon

conquering them most of the time, even though she was smaller than them.

Storm would hold his nose up and ignore his sister's stories about Salmon's talents. Salmon would hold her nose up and do the same, ignoring the annoying tom.

"Are Honey and Mouse meeting us here?" Salmon asked.

"Not quite," Oak replied nervously. Salmon tilted her head, then heard footsteps behind her.

Walking towards her was none other than Storm and his mentor, a large black tom with bright green eyes.

"Storm, Raven, thank you for meeting us," Oak greeted them.

Salmon stomped her paw down in anger, glaring at Storm as he stood across from her, grinning in satisfaction.

"Why am I fighting *him*?" Salmon asked.

"Storm is second-best, perhaps even better, than you in your training. Honey and Mouse have become too easy for you, and it's best you train with someone who is on the same level as you," Oak explained.

"But why couldn't it be another cat?!" Salmon replied. "I don't want to fight him!"

"Scared, huh?" Storm asked.

"No," Salmon spat.

"Settle down," Oak snapped. "Storm is the only cat at your level, Salmon. If you wish to become leader someday, it is best you know how to fight those who can fight even better than you. This will be good practice for you."

"As if," Salmon muttered.

Oak shoved her with his tail, and Salmon let out a low growl, following him into the woods with Storm and Raven walking by her.

Storm padded closer to Salmon, grinning.

"Raven's been training me real hard. Better watch out," he warned.

"Says the tom who isn't leader," Salmon muttered.

"You're only becoming heir because you're Oak's only kin. When he takes on another mate and they have a tom, your leadership is gone," Storm whispered.

"My father will not take on another mate. I know him well enough to know that," Salmon replied, turning away from Storm.

"Just remember what I said," he replied as they came to a small meadow, the one she usually practiced in with Honey and Mouse.

"Are you sure Honey and Mouse can't practice with us?" Salmon asked Oak again.

"Positive," Oak replied. "Stop complaining, Salmon. You're acting like a kit."

Hurt by her father's words, Salmon obeyed and stopped in the meadow with her father, waiting for further instructions.

"This looks like a good spot," Oak declared. "Now, you've been learning advanced attack moves as well, Storm, correct?"

Storm nodded, grinning proudly.

"He's very advanced for a cat of eleven months," Raven explained.

"Then it should not be too hard for a good fight to occur," Oak reasoned. "Now, Salmon, you are to practice these moves with Storm. It will be more challenging, but it will test your ability."

"This will be easy," Storm spoke.

"I'm going to rip your throat out," Salmon hissed.

Another kick came from Oak. Salmon shook her angry thoughts away and faced Storm, ready to fight.

"This isn't meant to be violent. Claws sheathed, teeth dull," Oak explained.

"Go!" Raven shouted.

The two began circling each other, Salmon growling at Storm. He rolled his eyes then launched. Salmon quickly turned away, causing Storm to stumble. He quickly regained his balance and growled, angry at Salmon.

"I thought you'd said it would be easy," Salmon teased.

"It is!" Storm shouted, leaping at Salmon again. Expecting him, Storm landed on top of her. Salmon quickly pawed at his belly, desperately wanting to unsheathe her claws and claw at him, but she obeyed her father's advice.

She was able to push Storm off, facing him once again. He snarled at her then leapt once more, this time knocking Salmon against the ground. Her shoulder hit the earth, and she yowled in pain, standing up slowly and facing Storm.

"Piece of fox-dung!" she shouted, leaping at him. In anger, she landed on top of Storm and held him down, her shoulder stinging.

Storm struggled beneath her grip, despite his size. Her anger made her grip strong.

"Behavior, Salmon!" Oak warned again.

Salmon knew displeasing her father would make him in an upset mood throughout the remainder of the week. If she were to complain again, how would her father punish her? What if Storm said was right? What if he was planning to take on another mate?

Would she still be leader?"

These thoughts, unfortunately, caused her grip to weaken, and Storm shoved her over, landing on top of her once again.

"Don't hurt each other!" Raven shouted.

Salmon growled and the two rolled across the ground, growling and hissing. She had never been this angry and violent with Mouse and Honey. Perhaps this was a good way to get her anger out at Storm.

Storm leapt once again, and Salmon moved, expecting his jump to be short. She was surprised when he landed on her, causing her to fall. She yowled and struggled to push him up. Suddenly, she felt sharp teeth bite down on her ear.

Salmon was shocked and gazed at Storm in disbelief. Drops of blood dripped onto the ground, and she struggled beneath his grip.

"I've seen enough!" Oak called.

"He bit me! He bit me!" Salmon shouted.

"The rule was to keep all claws and teeth sheathed. He did not bite you. Just because you lost does not mean you get to make up excuses," Oak growled.

"But he did! Look at my ear!" Salmon complained, running up to her father. He focused his eyes, then shook his head.

"You probably cut it on the ground when you fell," Oak explained. "Storm is a fair player."

"It's so unfair! He cheated!" Salmon shouted.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Storm replied, padding away with Raven.

"We'll need to increase your training, of course," Oak began, continuing to lecture Salmon on ways to improve. Ignoring him, she

glared at the grinning Storm as he padded away, her pelt spiked in anger.

Chapter 34

"Lemonpaw, it's time to go!" called Firelight from the edge of camp.

Lemonpaw sat at the fresh-kill pile with Raspberrypaw and Thymepaw, licking the last bit of the mouse she had eaten.

"I'll see you two later," she called.

"Have fun!" Raspberrypaw called as she ran off, Thymepaw waved his tail beside her, making Lemonpaw's heart warm.

Firelight's mood had shifted the past moon, his grouchy and serious tone turning into more of a lighthearted and caring smile. Lemonpaw had heard rumors and stories of Firelight before the death of his sister and mate. Why, she'd heard Appleclaw chat all day about how he used to smile like there were no worries in the world.

But Lemonpaw knew what was up. Instead of watching Firelight sulk around all day, she noticed he took a large craving towards hanging out with Snowdrop, a beautiful white she-cat Lemonpaw had often seen wandering around camp.

It was no doubt the two were falling in love, and to be honest, Lemonpaw was happy for Firelight. He didn't seem to screech as her that much anymore or growl around her. He was so preoccupied thinking of Snowdrop that it was as if anger had left his body altogether.

"So what's the plan for today?" Lemonpaw asked, padding alongside Firelight.

"We're meeting up with Snowdrop and Koipaw for some training," Firelight explained.

"Snowdrop and Koipaw? We've never practiced with them

before. How did you make that decision?" Lemonpaw asked, teasing him.

"I just decided that," Firelight replied, looking away. She could see his lips still curl into a smile though.

"Why don't you just ask her to be mates already?" Lemonpaw asked, shoving her mentor.

"My personal business is not yours," Firelight snapped. It was the same old Firelight all over again.

Lemonpaw was persistent though. "She obviously likes you. Are you too shy?"

"I should ask the same about you," Firelight replied, refusing to make eye contact with her.

"What does that mean?" Lemonpaw questioned.

"You and Thymepaw?"

Lemonpaw froze, not realizing he was able to pick up on her personal life too. "Th-that's not what it is," she argued.

Firelight laughed. "As if. It's obvious how you feel about him. Now, how about we get to some training?"

Lemonpaw growled, though she knew Firelight was right. She'd realized she'd loved Thymepaw for quite awhile now, yet she was too scared to mention anything too him. She supposed she was frightened of rejection.

As they came towards a clearing in the forest, Lemonpaw could make out Snowdrop and Koipaw already waiting for them. Lemonpaw hadn't spoken to Snowdrop that much, but she knew she was kind. As for Koipaw, Lemonpaw wasn't exactly looking forward to a day of training with the annoying she-cat.

"Good morning," Firelight called as he and Lemonpaw approached.

"Good morning, Firelight," Snowdrop purred. She turned her attention to Lemonpaw, her bright pink nose causing Lemonpaw's eyes to widen.

"Good morning, Lemonpaw," Snowdrop said.

"Morning," Lemonpaw replied.

"Can we get on with training instead of just saying 'good morning?'" Koipaw whined.

"Yes, Koipaw. Thanks for bringing Lemonpaw, Firelight. I know training is important to you. I just thought the she-cats could find that practicing battle moves on each other would be useful. They're somewhat similar in size," Snowdrop explained.

Both Koipaw and Lemonpaw exchanged confused glances, knowing Koipaw was taller and thinner than Lemonpaw.

"Well, if they both pass their apprentice exam in a moon, they'll be warriors, so it's best we train them and test their abilities," Firelight said.

Only a moon until she was a warrior? Where had the time gone?

Lemonpaw had not expected it to fly so past. She supposed she had been too wrapped up in her own world to notice the trees were already beginning to turn yellow and red again as leaf-fall approached. Her siblings were not the youngest apprentices anymore, and she guessed she hadn't even noticed the tiny gray hairs beginning to become visible on Hailfrost's muzzle.

"Thank goodness. The apprentice den is becoming crowded," Koipaw complained.

"Let's get to work," Firelight said, ignoring Koipaw's stupid comments.

"We're first going to test your reflexes when under attack. Koipaw, I want you to attack Lemonpaw," Snowdrop instructed.

"Will do," Koipaw responded, inching towards Lemonpaw and grinning.

"Keep your claws sheathed though," Snowdrop warned.

Lemonpaw shrunk down as Koipaw began to circle around her, her heart pounding with every second Koipaw remained still. As quick as lightning, Koipaw attacked. Anticipating where she would hit, Lemonpaw twisted her body so Koipaw landed over her, and she pawed at Koipaw's legs, causing Koipaw to fall onto the dirt.

"Ouch," Koipaw grumbled, standing up.

"Very good, Lemonpaw," Firelight purred.

Lemonpaw grinned, proud of her mentor's words. Unfortunately, looking at Firelight gave Koipaw the opportunity to strike again, this time causing Lemonpaw to fall onto the ground hard. Koipaw held her down, though Lemonpaw, being small, wriggled out from her and leapt over Koipaw, landing on the other side.

"Amazing! You're great at jumping!" Snowdrop observed.

Lemonpaw had never really noticed a spring in her step before, though she guessed it was mostly adrenaline.

Firelight did not comment though but only continued watching, his eyes narrowed. When Koipaw struck again, Lemonpaw kicked her in the stomach "unintentionally," allowing her to get away without the tiniest scratch on her.

"Let's take a break," Snowdrop suggested, seeing Koipaw sway from side to side.

"How do you do it?" Koipaw asked, groaning.

"Do what?" Lemonpaw asked.

"Your reflexes are quite strong, Lemonpaw," Snowdrop explained. "One of the best I've seen. They're close to a warrior."

"Yes," Firelight agreed, speaking for once. "In fact, they remind me of a SnowClan warrior's moves."

"A SnowClan warrior? I'm a member of NightClan!" Lemonpaw argued.

"Yes, you are," Snowdrop assured her. "To be fair, we don't know your biological parents. Maybe they're somehow related to SnowClan."

"I highly doubt that," Firelight explained. "But maybe your family is linked to a common ancestor among SnowClan cats. It's not a big deal," he said, but she could see suspicion in his eyes.

"Well, let's get back to work," Snowdrop commanded.

And so they continued working throughout the course of the day, Lemonpaw succeeding in most of her activities, Koipaw conquering in some. By the end of the day, the two she-cats were both exhausted, and she and Firelight waved good-bye as they headed back to camp.

"Good workout?" Firelight asked, noticing Lemonpaw was still panting.

Lemonpaw nodded, watching as the sun slowly lowered.

"Firelight," Lemonpaw said quietly.

"What?" he asked.

"If I did like Thymepaw, and I'm not saying I do, what would I say?" Lemonpaw asked.

Firelight laughed, causing Lemonpaw to shrink down in embarassment.

"So you do like him," he said. This time, Lemonpaw didn't argue. "Well, it's best to just approach him. I'm sure he likes you too. Of course, the speaking thing is a bit of an issue..."

"That's what I'm worried about," Lemonpaw sighed. "I still

feel guilty about his inability to speak. If I had saved him faster, maybe he could tell me his feelings. He can sign of course, and I know he knows how to say he loves me, but what if cats judge me?"

"Judge you?" Firelight asked.

"He's disabled. What if they say things about me? 'How can you like a cat who can't even talk, Lemonpaw?'"

"They wouldn't say that," Firelight spoke. And Lemonpaw believed him.

"I know. It's just so hard..."

"I've been thinking about asking Snowdrop to be my mate," Firelight admitted.

"You should!" Lemonpaw urged him.

"It's just that I feel guilty too. I never thought I'd love another cat besides Thrushwing, but she's dead, and there's nothing I can do about that. I'll see her in StarClan someday, and I know she would want me to be happy, but it just feels wrong," Firelight sighed.

"I didn't know Thrushwing, or your sister, but I know they'd want you to be happy. You've been so much happier with Snowdrop. StarClan is always offering second chances."

"Thanks," Firelight replied, grinning. "And if you tell anyone what I said..."

"I won't. Just don't tell anyone what I said either," Lemonpaw pleaded.

"I won't. Good night, Lemonpaw."

"Good night," she replied, heading into the apprentice den.

She found Thymepaw sitting near the back, bored as he tossed a mossball against the den wall.

"Hey, want to go on a walk?" Lemonpaw asked.

Thymepaw nodded and followed her outside and into the woods, grinning the entire way. Often times he'd sign and point out various objects, commenting on the new arrival of leaf-fall.

Lemonpaw nodded, though she'd begun to get nervous, wondering what Thymepaw would respond to her confession.

They stopped in a normal clearing, sitting down and watching the sunset. For a moment, they both remained silent as they sat close to each other, watching some geese fly across the sky.

Lemonpaw opened her mouth, only to be interrupted by Thymepaw. Watching him, he signed, "Can we talk?"

"I have to talk to you, too," Lemonpaw explained. "But you go first?"

Thymepaw nodded and took in a deep breath, then moved his paws in a motion she'd never seen him move them before. She watched as he signed the words, "I love you."

For a moment, Lemonpaw remained frozen, watching Thymepaw become incredibly nervous, immediately signing "Sorry" afterwards.

"No, don't be," Lemonpaw responded, beginning to laugh. Thymepaw looked at her with confusion.

"I asked to go on a walk to tell you the same thing," Lemonpaw explained. "I love you, too, Thymepaw," she purred.

"I am mute," he signed.

"So? You're still that same tom I played with in the nursery," Lemonpaw purred, intertwining her tail with his.

Thymepaw nodded and grinned as they sat in silence and watched the sunset.

Chapter 35

It was a warm summer day, and Sunrise sat outside in her backyard, sunbathing. She enjoyed the feeling of having the warm sun beat down on her white belly, and she purred in satisfaction, rolling over and sniffing the breeze.

She sure enjoyed summer more than the winter. Instead of slipping on icy pavement and wet snow, she instead could sit outside in the sun all day and rest, completely carefree.

Holly and Polly often wandered outside, getting a bit of sun on their own, but often they remained by the window where rays of sun entered through the house. Still, they were forced to go outside at least twice a day for a certain amount of minutes.

The sound of the cat door opening made Sunrise turn, and she glanced, watching as Holly and Polly squeezed through the tiny space.

"Bit hard, isn't it?" Sunrise asked.

Her sisters annoyed her, sitting down next to the door.

"You're not even going to come out onto the grass?" Sunrise asked, rolling around in the leafy substance.

"Disgusting!" Polly spat. "Your pelt is going to be covered in green."

"I don't mind," Sunrise admitted, sitting back up. "What's so bad about being outside?"

"She's so weird," Holly muttered.

"Ever since we told her about clan cats," Polly replied.

Sunrise could hear them of course, not that she cared. Living with her sisters wasn't so bad anymore now that she had the

company of Fawn and Anna. She hadn't spoken much to Frog since his arrival, especially after all the hissing and growling that had taken place before. Still, Anna often spoke of him, often advising her and Fawn to leave him be.

"I don't see what the big fuss is about," Sunrise said at last to the two. "It's the outside. You're not in some animal shelter where they have bars and no windows."

"Animal shelter? Where in heavens did you hear about those places?" Polly asked.

"I get around," Sunrise explained, standing up now and shaking the pieces of grass from her pelt.

"Going inside now?" Holly asked.

"Why? It's beautiful out here!" Sunrise exclaimed.

"I want to live out the rest of my life in peace!" Polly complained. "Why did she have to come with us that day?"

"Perhaps it was destiny," Sunrise explained.

"As if," Holly snorted. "I can't even believe we're related to you. If only Caramel would take you back. Who knows where she is by now?"

Sunrise paused, not really thinking much about her mother and siblings. She'd been separated from them for many months now, knowing she'd most likely never see them again.

"She's probably having another litter. She likes to replace us so often," Polly responded to her sister.

"Another litter?" Sunrise asked.

"Honestly, Sunrise. You know so much about clan cats that you don't even think about kittypet life! Caramel and Whiskers are mates, which means they'll have other litters, which means more kittens to sell," Holly explained.

"Why more kittens? We were a big litter."

"The humans get money," Polly responded. "I can't believe you're so dumb."

"That's why we were born?" Sunrise asked, not hurt. "Because our former owners wanted money?"

"Well, they sure didn't want to keep us, that's for sure. I'm sure money is a nice exchange. I wonder if our parents even remember our names," Polly thought. Sunrise knew they were only saying these things to get on her nerves, but she couldn't stop herself.

"Caramel and Whiskers loved us!" Sunrise argued.

"Please, Sunrise. What do you know about love? You may think your owner loves you, but that's just because he feeds you and keeps you safe."

"My owner does love me," Sunrise spat, thinking of the boy. "He feeds me and talks to me, scratches me under my chin. Caramel was kind to me, too. She was kind to all of us. Whiskers was as well! How can you say they didn't love us?"

"Because they gave us away so willingly. We were just another litter of kits to them. I didn't see them keeping us," Holly explained. From her words, Sunrise could tell that perhaps she felt a bit hurt as well.

"Y-You don't know anything about love! You're fat and lazy, and you don't have any friends! Step outside and smell the roses! Maybe you'll actually meet a cat!" Sunrise hissed, unsheathing her claws.

"Feisty," Polly purred. "As I recall, you hang out with what? An old tabby and some weird cat next door? You haven't even fallen in love with a handsome tom."

"Shut up," Sunrise muttered, hopping up on the fence. She was through with their stupid remarks, and she decided she'd look for Fawn instead.

"Oh, now you've made the warrior mad. Let's hope she doesn't declare battle on our clan," Holly joked. Polly and Holly both erupted in laughter, and Sunrise disappeared into Fawn's backyard, annoyed with her sisters once again.

"Fawn?" Sunrise asked quietly, padding around her friend's backyard.

"Sunrise?" a response came from some rose bushes. Fawn stood near them, licking one of her paws.

"What are Holly and Polly laughing about?" Fawn asked.

"Stupid things," Sunrise replied. "How are you?"

"Good. It's a beautiful day, isn't it? I was just about to visit Anna, maybe even see Frog. I was hoping you'd join me," Fawn proposed.

"Sure!" Sunrise exclaimed, excited. She walked with Fawn along the fenceline, gazing at the freshly grown flowers and vegetables that grew in the backyards of neighbors.

"I've already snuck a tomato. It's delicious!" Fawn purred.

"Tomato?" Sunrise asked.

"Ripe red things that grow in that backyard," Fawn explained, pointing to a neatby backyard. "Maybe we can sneak one on the way back."

"How are your dreams?" Sunrise asked as they approached Anna's house.

"Same as ever. No cat has spoken to me, but I've heard them speak to each other," Fawn said.

"Find out which clan it is?"

"I'm not sure. The scene changes each time. Sometimes I think it's one clan, and then sometimes it seems like it's another. My dreams are weird though. I wouldn't worry about it," Fawn assured

her.

Upon arriving in Anna's backyard, they hopped down from the wooden fence and landed in her backyard, gazing around for the old cat.

She sat near her door, sound asleep.

"Anna!" Fawn whispered loudly.

The old she-cat's ears pricked, and slowly, her eyes opened. She licked her lips and grinned, revealing pointy teeth.

"Good morning."

"It's afternoon," Sunrise pointed out.

"Already? I could've sworn I just ate breakfast. Fawn, how are you?" Anna asked.

As expected, Anna always seemed to take more interest in speaking to Fawn.

"I'm fine, thank you. We came to visit you," Fawn explained.

"Well, nothing really interesting has happened with me. I'm an old cat. It's exciting if I hop up my fence," Anna explained, laughing. "How are you, Sunrise?"

"Good," Sunrise replied quietly.

"And the dreams, Fawn?"

"Same as ever," Fawn spoke.

"Good, good. I speak with Frog sometimes. He's a grouchy old tom, yet he enjoys telling me stories. We like to exchange them, you see."

"Frog barely told us anything," Fawn admitted.

"He's shy," Anna teased. "Why not visit him? I don't plan on doing anything else for the day. Perhaps it'd be nice to pay him a

bit of a visit?"

"Sure," Sunrise agreed. They waved good-bye to Anna and leapt on top of the fence, trying to remember where Frog lived. Once they found a backyard that looked familiar, they leapt down, startling the tom and causing him to awake from his nap.

"StarClan's souls!" he gasped, opening his eyes and standing up. As he focused on the two, he frowned, letting out a low growl.

"Great. The traveling circus is back," he muttered.

"Anna said it'd be good to visit you," Sunrise explained.

"Anna doesn't know what's good for me, and neither do you. I am an old tom simply seeking luxury and peace by living the life of a kittypet. I don't need you two checking on me and demanding me to tell you tales," he snapped.

"We weren't asking to listen to stories, for your information," Fawn responded a bit too harshly.

"Well, the topic would come up eventually, wouldn't it? I don't suppose you'd be asking me what kitty food I eat, would you?" Frog asked.

"Why do you wish to keep the past hidden so much?" Sunrise wondered.

"Sunrise," Fawn warned.

"Pardon me, young she-cat, but that is a personal question. I live this life to escape my past, not recall it," Frog grumbled.

"But sharing it would be helpful, wouldn't it?" Sunrise questioned.

"Look here, Sunset," he grumbled.

"Sunrise," she correct him.

"Whatever. I understand you're into clan cats. Anna's told

me that. Your friend here is gifted by StarClan. This does not mean you can go around begging me to tell you all I know. You're a kittypet, and you have no chance of living a warrior life. Sorry to break it to you. Now scram!" he shouted.

Sunrise, hurt, followed Fawn back up the fence, tail drooping.

"Don't take what he said personally. He's just an old tom. We should tell Anna to have a word with him. That'd be okay, wouldn't it?" Fawn asked.

Sunrise nodded sadly, trying to look as if the words hadn't hurt her, but they had.

"I'm actually going to head back home. I'm a bit tired, and my owner just bought me a new toy the other day. I'll see you later, Fawn," Sunrise told her.

"Oh, well, okay, Sunrise. I'll see you later!" Fawn responded, waving.

Sunrise waved her tail back then disappeared in her backyard, wishing she had been born to another cat in another life.

Chapter 36

It was another day in the SnowClan camp, and Lifepaw sat out in camp, sharing a squirrel with Goosepaw. She had graciously been given the day off by Tinypelt, leaving her to spend the day with Goosepaw.

Goosepaw grinned at her as he took a bite of the squirrel. They'd grown closer since his confession of love, though she still had enough time to share with Marshpaw and Ripplepaw. Often thoughts would cross her brain of her and Goosepaw becoming mates, them having kits. They were stupid thoughts, but she couldn't help herself.

Lifepaw's father didn't seem to notice whatsoever. Lifepaw had tried countlessly to tell Patchfur herself, but he often found he did not have time for her troubles. Even Mousestripe was too busy helping Thornstar to listen to her. Then, she had tried to talk to Stormnight and Graytail, but Stormnight was a father, and Graytail had a mate of his own, leaving Lifepaw to wish her mother was alive even more.

"Muscles sore?" Goosepaw asked as Lifepaw stretched.

"A little," she admitted.

The day prior, Goosepaw, Lifepaw, and Marshpaw had all been training roughly as they practiced battle moves. Their apprentice exam would take place very soon, so hard practice was necessary if they were to become warriors.

"Hey there, lovebirds!" Marshpaw teased as he padded over.

Lifepaw rolled her eyes and glanced up at the tom. "And what are you up to, Marshpaw?" she asked.

"Nothing much. I kind of wish I wasn't given the day off. It's

incredibly boring. Have any of you seen Blueocean? I can't find her anywhere!" Marshpaw exclaimed.

"She's probably on patrol or hunting," Goosepaw told him. "She doesn't always have time for your troubles, Marshpaw."

Marshpaw grinned and sat down next to them. "So, was I interrupting something?"

Unlike Lifepaw's family, Marshpaw and Ripplepaw were fairly aware of the romance going on between Goosepaw and Lifepaw, often teasing them about it.

"We were just sharing a squirrel," Goosepaw explained.

"How romantic!" Marshpaw gasped.

Lifepaw rolled her eyes and sat up. She was about to tell Goosepaw she was going to talk to Mousestripe when a cry of cats sounded from the entrance of the camp.

Simultaneously, they all turned towards the entrance, watching as the cats from patrol entered into camp, taking guard a struggling white and gray tom that Lifepaw had never seen before, though he looked somewhat familiar.

"No, please!" came another cry. It was not the tom, but Blueocean, rushing beside them. "Don't hurt him!"

"What's going on?" Goosepaw asked Lifepaw.

She shrugged, watching as Thornstar approached.

"Who is this? What is going on?" he asked.

"We caught this tom trespassing on SnowClan territory," a speckled tom, Speckledfoot, told Thornstar.

"Trespassing?" Thornstar asked.

"That's not all," added Sparrowwing. "We caught him and Blueocean together, talking."

Thornstar turned his gaze to Blueocean. From the distance, Lifepaw could detect anger in his eyes.

"Do you know this tom, Blueocean?" Thornstar asked.

There was a pause, and then Blueocean hung her head down in shame. "Yes."

Lifepaw felt Goosepaw tense beside her.

"What's going on with her?" Ripplepaw called as she ran out of the medicine cat den, sitting beside Marshpaw, Goosepaw, and Lifepaw.

"We don't know," Lifepaw replied.

"And who are you?" Thornstar asked the tom.

The tom did not reply but only looked at him.

"Who are you?" Thornstar asked again.

"He reeks of StormClan," a calico she-cat growled.

"I'm going to ask again. Who are you?" Thornstar asked.

"Gooseleaf!" the tom spat.

"And you're a StormClan tom, aren't you?"

Gooseleaf nodded.

"How did you ever come to know a StormClan tom, Blueocean? Why weren't you chasing him off the territory?" Thornstar asked. He watched Pinethorn dart by quickly.

"Pinethorn, come here!" Thornstar called.

Pinethorn obeyed, though he looked fairly nervous. He stood by Thornstar.

"Yes?" he asked.

"Did you know your mate knew of this tom?" he asked.

Pinethorn did not reply, shuffling his paws.

"Just tell him, Pinethorn," Blueocean sighed.

"Tell me what?" Thornstar asked.

"Pinethorn is not Blueocean's mate," Gooseleaf admitted before either of them could speak. "I am."

A gasp sounded from the cats, and whispers of exile came.

"This must be a shock to you, Pinethorn," someone spoke.

"Leave Pinethorn out of this," Blueocean growled. "He was only protecting me."

"What's going on?" Goosepaw called, breaking away from Lifepaw. His siblings followed behind, and Lifepaw carefully approached closer.

"Oh, kits. I didn't want you to find out this way," Blueocean sighed. Before she spoke, Lifepaw already knew what was going on. Gooseleaf had looked so familiar not because Lifepaw had seen him before, but because she had seen his face on another cat—three in particular.

Goosepaw had seemed to notice this to because he paused, saying, "Is he..."

"Pinethorn is not your father. Gooseleaf is. You are half-StormClan," Blueocean admitted.

Another gasp came from the clan.

"No, I can't be!" Marshpaw shouted. "I'm SnowClan through and through."

"You're StormClan," Gooseleaf told them. "And I'm sorry, kits. I did not want you to learn this way either."

"You're not our father! Pinethorn is!" Ripplepaw hissed.

Pinethorn placed his tail on Ripplepaw's shoulder. "Gooseleaf is your real father, but I have enjoyed raising you kits."

"You knew of this, Pinethorn?" Thornstar asked.

Pinethorn dipped his head. "I did, but I did it only for Blueocean and the sake of the kits. I truly do love you, Blueocean, and I know you never truly loved me, but I was happy to know you and the kits were safe from secrets. I pretended to be their father to protect them, and I have only brought shame to the clan. I wish to resign from my deputy position," he insisted.

Gasps came from the clan.

"No!" shouted Goosepaw. "Father, er, Pinethorn, you're a great deputy!"

"But I have lied to my clan. I can no longer be trusted," Pinethorn sighed.

Thornstar paused for a moment. "No, Pinethorn, you do not have to resign."

"He broke the code!" cats shouted.

"And so have I," Thornstar admitted. "Was it not I that became mates with a medicine cat who gave birth to our kits? Tawnyheart is dead now, but because of my stupidity, her life was ruined. Cloudstar assigned me deputy because he knew a good leader made mistakes and acknowledges them. Therefore, I will give you a second chance, Pinethorn, and I know you will not fail me."

"Thank you, Thornstar," Pinethorn said. "But I ask you to please be kind to Blueocean too."

Blueocean winced as Thornstar approached. "I only did it for the kits. Exile me if you wish, but not the kits."

"I will not exile you either, for Tasha too mated with a

MoonClan tom. Her kits do not possess SnowClan blood at all. Of course, Blueocean, if you do not refuse to cut off all ties with this tom, I must exile you."

Blueocean nodded, tears gathering in her eyes. Cats released Gooseleaf, and he quickly ran to Blueocean.

"I am sorry," he told her. "I did not mean for my actions to hurt so many cats. I love you, Blueocean, and I wish things had been different. If only we lived in the same clan."

"But we don't. I am loyal to SnowClan, and you to StormClan.It is our kits' decisions where they are loyal to."

"I'm staying here," Goosepaw growled. Marshpaw nodded beside him.

"Me too," Ripplepaw agreed.

"I did not expect them to join me. They've been lied to and don't know their true father. Even though I've only just met you, I've heard so much about you. I beg you kits to forgive me. I truly do love you. Maybe we will meet again someday," he purred.

He took a step close, but the kits stepped back.

"Don't touch us," Marshpaw growled.

Gooseleaf nodded, then turned to Blueocean. He gave her one last lick, then turned to the cats.

"Please escort me home now. I'm willing to take the punishment from my own leader," he sighed.

Cats nodded, escorting him away. Lifepaw watched as Blueocean stood in pain.

As soon as he was gone, cats were silent with shock.

"How dare you?!" Marshpaw growled at his mother. "Lying to us?"

"It's not that simple," Blueocean began.

"You could've just told us!" Ripplepaw exclaimed.

"ENOUGH!" Lifepaw shouted, stepping forward. Cats froze, unsure why she was speaking.

"I've had enough of you being so cruel. Blueocean loves you three very much, and she did so much to protect you. So what if you're half-StormClan? You're loyal to SnowClan, and that's what matters! My mother is dead, so how can you be so angry at a cat you are blessed to have? And the way you spoke to Gooseleaf! He truly did love you and wanted your forgiveness, but you turned him away. But yet you are not mad at Pinethorn, who also lied to keep you safe. I know you don't want this to be the truth, but it is! And it's makes me so mad that you don't see the blessings in your life and the love of others!"

With those words, she turned away, leaving the others gaping with wide mouths. She rushed towards the apprentice den, finding her nest. In it, she began to cry, thinking of her mother. She wished Shinypelt would comfort her, but she was dead. There would be no comforting.

It was later that day when Goosepaw, Marshpaw, and Ripplepaw made their way into the apprentice den.

Lifepaw looked up, then growled.

"Yes?" she asked.

"We wanted to apologize," Ripplepaw admitted. "We've already spoken to Pinethorn and Blueocean and have fixed everything up. We even thanked them, and we truly did mean it."

"You were right, Lifepaw," Marshpaw sighed. "We were even given permission to see Gooseleaf tomorrow and express our forgiveness."

Goosepaw nodded beside him.

"We ask for your forgiveness too," Goosepaw asked.

"I forgive all of you, and I'm sorry for shouting. It hurt me to know you could not see what I could. It's all good."

Marshpaw and Ripplepaw smiled and strayed away, leaving Goosepaw behind.

"Are you okay?" Lifepaw asked.

"I'm named after him," Goosepaw sighed. "Blueocean told me. I wish I didn't have his name."

"But you do. You can't change that," Lifepaw pointed out.

"I'm sure you don't love me anymore," Goosepaw admitted.

"Why not?" Lifepaw asked.

"I'm half-StormClan! I'm not the tom you thought I was! Now there's this whole terrible past associated with me! How could you love a half-breed like me?" he asked.

"But I do," Lifepaw purred. For some reason, her mind scampered back to her as a kit, when she refused to play with Tasha's kits because they too were half-breeds, not even possessing SnowClan blood.

"I love you because you're Goosepaw. Just because you're given a new past does not change you."

"Easy for you to say. You're full SnowClan, and your past makes perfect sense."

"I haven't had the best past. My mother is dead, I don't have much family, and I never even hear about her. But the past is in the past, so instead, we should focus on the present, because that is the past I want to look back on," she purred.

Goosepaw grinned and nuzzled her.

"Thank you for understanding. I was scared you'd abandon me."

"I never would. I love you," Lifepaw purred.

Chapter 37

"Get up, Salmon!" Oak called from the den she slept in. She lazily opened her eyes, finding the sun was only just beginning to rise. The others were asleep, and Salmon stood up, yawning as she followed her father outside.

"Why are you waking me up so early?" she asked.

"Have you forgotten today is your last day of training?" he asked.

Salmon paused, memories flooding back to her. Of course! How had she forgotten? Today she would be completing her training and would be declared an official member of the tribe and future heir...if she beat her father in the evening in a duel.

But for now, it was only morning, and she assumed they'd just be reviewing some poses.

"What are we doing right now?" she asked, grabbing a rabbit from the pile of kill that sat near the dens.

"You are to catch prey in this time," Oak explained. "It's part of your end of training test."

"You mean we won't be reviewing battle moves or anything?" Salmon asked, taking a bite of rabbit.

"You have already learned battle moves, and you will show them to me tonight. But for now, you must catch prey to show you understand the importance of hunting and providing for the tribe," Oak explained.

Salmon nodded. It was customary, of course, for a young cat to show both their hunting and battle moves their last day. Hunting would not be a problem as most cats were used to catching prey by now. Beating her father, however, was different.

Young cats were required to challenge their mentors who had been training them. If they succeeded in beating them, they were allowed to continue training. If not, they were shamed, thrown out. Only the strongest were to survive.

But for Salmon, this meant much more than being kicked out of the tribe. Beating her father kept her place, but it also confirmed she would be the true heir to her father. Watching the supposed heir battle the leader was always spoken of as a spectacle.

And this evening, at sunset preferably, cats would be gathered to watch this spectacle unfold and see if Salmon really would take Oak's place someday.

"You have all morning to hunt," Oak explained as Salmon took her last bite of rabbit. "We will come back for a meal. You may rest, or practice, until sunset. Then, the duel takes place."

Salmon nodded, following Oak into the woods. She could hear Mouse, Honey, and Storm in the distance. They had recently become full members themselves a few days earlier.

Cats had gasped as Storm beat his mentor in all of a few minutes. Salmon hadn't even watched, fleeing to the den after watching Mouse and Honey succeed. The last thing she needed was the tom to brag more about himself. She was still mad about him cheating during practice.

She followed Oak farther into the forest, stopping at a large oak tree.

"When the sun's rays are fully shining on this tree, the hunting session is over," Oak explained. "Are you ready?"

Salmon nodded.

"Then go!" Oak roared.

Salmon wished he hadn't shouted. He'd probably scared off all the prey. Either way, it was the beginning of leaf-fall now, and prey would not be as plentiful as she hoped.

She made her way towards the cherry blossom tree her mother had been buried by. Most of the blossoms were gone by now. In fact, Salmon wondered why some still remained. They did not remain in bloom this long.

Berry, the healer, had explained the myth that when a newly departed cat joins their natural object, the object becomes more alive. She claimed this was the explanation for the tree's still-pink blossoms.

But Salmon knew only three or four blososms remained, though they took their sweet time to fade away.

"Please, give me luck, Mother," Salmon begged, heading off. She thought back to the hawk she had caught when she was only six moons. She still wondered how she had managed to catch such a large piece of prey.

The forest was quiet, and Salmon pricked her ears, hoping for a little bit of sound. Thankfully, she heard a twig crack, and she turned, spotting a squirrel grabbing a newly fallen acorn from the ground.

She crouched down and stealthily approached, leaping. The squirrel's eyes widened with fear, but it was too late. She grabbed the squirrel in her claws and killed it, smiling at the newly dead squirrel in her paws.

Unfortunately, she knew this would not be enough. Storm had boasted that he had caught a full-grown deer, though it had been too large to drag back to camp. His mentor confirmed this, but Salmon didn't believe him. Still, she knew she had to keep hunting.

After burying the squirrel, she headed farther into the forest, praying for a hawk, an eagle even, to land so that she could kill it. But would cats care? No, her father only wanted to see that she could hunt. That was all.

As she kept hunting, she managed to catch a few mice, a rabbit, and another squirrel. She knew this was far more than enough, but she felt as if she still needed to catch something

else...something bigger.

As soon as she thought those words, the sound of a snarl caught her attention. A fox was sitting by a tree nearby, growling at Salmon. Salmon was not a large cat, and obviously the fox assumed she would not be too difficult to kill.

"N-Nice fox," she said, backing up. Oak had told her never to show fear in front of a predator, but her legs trembled, and she held her breath.

The fox approached, then leapt. Salmon ducked as the fox flew over her, turning to face it. The fox snarled, its teeth white and sharp, ready to bite down on Salmon.

Salmon took a deep breath and leapt, biting the fox's side. The fox cried out in pain but continued fighting, slashing Salmon's leg.

Salmon yowled in pain, but the cut was not too bad. She clawed at the fox's snout, then leapt on it again and shoved her claws into its pelt.

It screeched and threw her off, but Salmon kept up the fight. She leapt one last time as the fox bounced around in pain. Raising her claw, she turned away, shoving the claw into its throat. The fox fell beside her, twitching until it remained still.

She backed away, licking her wound and the fox's blood from her pelt. She had brought down a whole fox by herself. Was it even possible?

"Salmon! Salmon!" Oak called, rushing through the woods.

"Here!" Salmon called weakly.

He ran to her, then froze. "Oh, thank goodness you're all right. We spotted a fox around here, and..." He froze, turning to see the dead fox that lay beside her.

"Did you kill that thing?" he asked.

She nodded. "I was only completing my hunt when it decided to attack me."

Oak approached the dead fox, simply amazed. "My. How did the hunt go? I came to tell you it was over."

"Good. I caught three mice, two squirrels, and one rabbit."

"Excellent, especially for leaf-fall. The fact you brought down a whole fox is surprising too. You did not have any help, did you?"

"Only our ancestors," Salmon explained.

"Grab your prey and we'll head back. Berry can fix up that wound of yours."

After retrieving prey, she accompanied Oak back to their camp, glad to see the bleeding on her leg had stopped. Upon arriving into camp, cats cheered.

"She has completed the first half of her final test!" Oak rejoiced.

Cats cheered, and Salmon smiled, though the pain in her leg caused her to frown.

"I bet she didn't kill a deer," Storm snarled.

"You couldn't even bring it back," Mouse teased.

"She brought down the fox that was invading our territory," Oak explained.

"All by herself?" a cat asked.

"I don't believe it," Storm growled.

Salmon walked past him, rolling her eyes. "Well, I'll just be going to Berry then to get my leg fixed up from another creature that you'll believe."

"You probably just tripped," Storm mumbled as Salmon walked past him.

"Salmon! Salmon!" Berry called before Salmon could get close to the den.

"What?" Salmon asked. "Berry, I need you to fix up—"

"I must talk to you now. Follow me," the dark ginger she-cat said, leading Salmon away from the cats. Oak raised an eyebrow but did not question Berry.

Salmon followed Berry into her den, confused.

"I killed a fox," she explained.

Berry rolled her eyes and started applying some cobwebs to the wound.

"I am not here to talk about the fox. It is vitally important I speak with you," she explained.

"What is it?" Salmon asked.

"I had a dream," Berry told her.

"As did I," Salmon replied.

"Stop the sarcasm," Berry snapped. "This was important, yet odd."

"What did you dream?" Salmon asked.

"As healer, I am usually only gifted with the ability to heal the wounds of cats. Sometimes, there are myths of healers able to speak to those past through nature, but it is only a myth. This was just bizarre."

"What did you dream?" Salmon repeated.

"It was a prophecy," Berry explained.

"A prophecy? We don't even have prophecies," Salmon

growled. "Isn't that a clan cat thing?"

Berry nodded. "Never have I even heard a cat speak to me in my dream. It was a starry cat, shining in the dim light. She spoke calmly, saying, 'As the Moon's shine vanishes and the light burns out, another cat will be lost. Four will come, all the same, but with different stories. The four must unite and rescue the lost cat and themselves or else the Place of No Stars will gain a star.'"

"What does that even mean?" Salmon wondered.

"I do not know. These words are foreign to me. But I was given an image."

"An image?" Salmon asked.

"Yes. Of you. Well, it looked like you. Except there were four of you."

"Four of me?" Salmon questioned. Berry had lost it.

"Do you know another cat who looks exactly like you? There are three others!" Berry exclaimed.

"Look, Berry, I appreciate this, but I don't think this means anything. It's just a silly dream."

"A silly dream?!" Berry gasped.

Salmon nodded.

"Maybe, but keep an eye out, Salmon. Something strange is going on," Berry warned.

Salmon nodded and exited, quickly ignoring Berry's warning.

"What did Berry say?" Oak asked.

"Nothing important," Salmon told him, walking away to eat. The dream had simply meant nothing to Salmon.

Chapter 38

"Get up! Get up!" Raspberrypaw hissed in Lemonpaw's ear. Lemonpaw slowly opened her eyes, yawning.

"What is it?" she groaned, turning over to go back to sleep.

"We have our exam today, Lemonpaw!" Raspberrypaw exclaimed. "Everyone else is already up! Come on!"

The exam! How could Lemonpaw have forgotten? She'd been so excited the day before as she spoke with her friends about if they'd do well. Frostflight and Hailfrost had assured her she'd do well, and her siblings had also encouraged her.

Lemonpaw raced outside the apprentice den, finding Raspberrypaw and Thymepaw sitting near the fresh-kill pile eating a rabbit. Mangopaw, Koipaw, and Windpaw, the other three apprentices who would be doing their exam, were also scattered throughout the camp.

"Here, eat a bite!" Raspberrypaw called, shoving the rabbit towards her.

Lemonpaw nodded, taking a bite of the rabbit. She felt queasy though, and she realized she was incredibly nervous for her test today.

"Are you okay?" Thymepaw signed.

Lemonpaw nodded. "Nervous, that's all."

"Don't be. You'll do *fine,* Lemonpaw," Raspberrypaw assured her.

"You're not nervous?" Lemonpaw asked.

"A little, but every cat should be. Think about it! Tonight, we'll be warriors! Isn't that exciting?!"

Lemonpaw nodded, though it seemed unreal. Hadn't she been playing in the nursery only a few moons ago?

"Lemonpaw! Lemonpaw!" voices squeaked. Lemonpaw turned, watching as her siblings ran forward.

"Good luck today!" Pearpaw exclaimed.

"You'll do great," Spotpaw assured her.

"Thanks," Lemonpaw purred.

"Soon, we'll be apprentices with you!" Desertpaw exclaimed.

"Well, you've got to finish training first," Lemonpaw pointed out.

"Leave your sister alone and let her focus," Frostflight said calmly. The kits greeted their mother then ran off, leaving Frostflight with Lemonpaw.

"Hi," Lemonpaw said quietly.

Raspberrypaw and Thymepaw exchanged glances. "We've got to go, Lemonpaw!" Raspberrypaw called. "We'll see you later today for the ceremony!"

Lemonpaw nodded, waving good-bye to her friends.

"I don't think I've spoken to you in awhile," Frostflight admitted.

Lemonpaw shook her head.

"From what I've heard, Firelight has said you have been a great apprentice, and I believe it."

"You do?" Lemonpaw asked.

"Yes. And I'm very proud of you, Lemonpaw. I may not be your mother, but you'll always be my daughter," she purred. Lemonpaw could notice tiny crystals in her eyes.

"Are you crying, Frostflight?" Lemonpaw asked, her jaw quivering as well.

"I'm just very proud," she wailed, licking the top of Lemonpaw's head.

Hailfrost came up a moment later. "Lemonpaw," he said, dipping his head.

Lemonpaw repeated the action, gazing up at him.

"Are you crying, Frostflight?" Hailfrost asked.

Frostflight shook her head, unable to speak through her tears.

"I am also proud of you, Lemonpaw," Hailfrost spoke. "You'll do great today."

"Thank you. And I want to thank both of you for raising me. I could've just been an orphaned kit in the nursery, and Frostflight, you could've just nursed me and that was that. But instead, you invited me into your family. I feel like you two really are my parents, and your kits are my siblings."

"Of course you're a part of our family," Hailfrost said softly, grinning warmly. "I see Firelight. Good luck today."

"Good-bye. I love you, Mom and Dad!" she called. It sounded weird on her tongue, but she did feel as if Frostflight and Hailfrost truly were her parents. No other cats loved her more.

Firelight sat near the entrance of the forest, grinning. Recently, he'd become mates with Snowdrop, and Lemonpaw truly was glad for him. She knew other cats were too since he no longer held regrets about his sister and Thrushwing. He actually would smile more often than frown nowadays.

"Are you ready?" Firelight asked.

Lemonpaw nodded. "I'm ready for my exam."

"Good," he purred. "First, you'll be demonstrating the battle moves I have taught you by fighting me."

Lemonpaw gulped but nodded, following Firelight into the forest. They stopped in a clearing, and Lemonpaw's heart beat rapidly against her chest.

"Ready?" Firelight asked.

Before she could nod, she leapt at him. Firelight, taken by surprise, stumbled over, tossing her off of him. This time he leapt at her, and Lemonpaw ducked underneath him, clawing at his belly.

He fell over, and she pinned him down, snarling. Firelight struggled beneath her and pushed her off, his muscular legs stronger than Lemonpaw's. He began to chase Lemonpaw, and she turned, flinging over him.

Firelight spun around, and Lemonpaw stood firmly, facing Firelight. She then leapt at him and knocked him to the ground, causing Firelight to gasp for breath. She then pinned him down, all her force in her paws. He struggled beneath her for a little bit and then she let go.

"Very good," he said, standing up. "You've passed the battle part of the exam. Now, it's hunting time. You know the rules, yes?"

Lemonpaw nodded.

"Very good. I expect lots of prey when you return."

Lemonpaw nodded, leaving Firelight and rushing into the woods. Unfortunately, the arrival of leaf-fall left with her not much prey, and she looked around, hoping to find a little bit of prey. Fresh-kill had slowly decreased, but she knew that with enough effort, she'd be able to get the right amount to impress Firelight.

Throughout the rest of the morning and into the afternoon, she hunted harder than she ever had before. She never ran into the other apprentices, guessing they'd all been given their equal share of the territory to hunt in.

She returned to Firelight with a two rabbits, a couple mice, and one robin. Firelight was pleased, and he gazed at her warmly.

"You've passed," he purred.

Lemonpaw gasped. "I did?!"

"Congratulations, Lemonpaw. You'll be made a warrior this evening!" he exclaimed.

Lemonpaw bounced up and down excitedly. She'd be made a warrior! It truly was an exciting occasion!

After her excitement died down, she turned to Firelight. "Thank you, Firelight, for all the teaching. I know we did not get along well when I first became your apprentice, but I truly did learn a lot for you and wouldn't be anywhere without your help today," she explained, dipping her head.

Firelight grinned, then frowned.

"Is something wrong?" she asked.

"I want to thank you for being a good apprentice, and I formally want to apologize for the way I treated you."

"Don't," Lemonpaw warned before he continued. "You had lost your family. I understand."

"No, you don't," Firelight sighed.

"What do you mean?" Lemonpaw asked.

"Yes, I was still depressed because of the death of my sister and mate, but there was something else I never told you."

"What's that?" Lemonpaw asked, suddenly concerned.

"After the battle, I was walking through the woods, sulking about Thrushwing's death. All the other cats were back at camp being tended to. I had some injuries of my own, though they weren't bothering me, so I decided to sulk around the woods. While

I was walking, I heard the faint sound of a whimpering kitten."

Lemonpaw's eyes widened as he continued his story.

"So I kept on walking, thinking it was nothing, when I heard the sound again. This time it was louder, and I began to search for the noise. When I finally did find where the noise was coming from, I found a newborn kit, wriggling and whimpering. Can you guess who that kit was?"

"Me?" Lemonpaw gasped.

Firelight nodded. "You were all abandoned, and I looked around for a cat that had left you nearby, but I couldn't find anyone. I decided to bring you back to camp, and I explained the situation to Silverstar, asking if we could raise the kitten as a NightClan cat."

"So neither Hailfrost nor Frostflight found me?" Lemonpaw asked.

Firelight shook his head. "It was me who found you that day, and I was the one who named you. And I would've raised you myself Lemonpaw, if it wasn't for..." His voice trailed off.

"If it wasn't for what?"

"When I looked at you, you reminded me of Thrushwing," Firelight admitted. "I knew I could not deal with the emotional burden of caring for you, so I asked Frostflight to raise you. She offered to raise you so that you thought of her and Hailfrost as your real parents, but I disagreed and said to let you know you were found. She asked me if I wanted to be a part of your kithood and act as a father, but I also disagreed. And then Silverstar made me your apprentice, an act of revenge, almost," he admitted, laughing a little. "That's why I was grouchy. Because you reminded me of Thrushwing, of my sister, and I still see them in you. Forgive me."

"Oh, Firelight," Lemonpaw sighed. "I never knew. But I want to thank you anyway."

"But I lied to you all this time."

"You made the right decision giving me to Frostflight and Hailfrost. They love me, and even though they're not my true parents, they raised me well. And just because you never raised me doesn't mean I can't look up to you now. You are also like a father to me, Firelight."

"Really? That's all I ever wanted," Firelight purred.

"And you swear you saw no cats in the woods that day?" she asked.

Firelight sighed. "No, I did not. If I had news of your true parents, I would tell you. Are you curious?"

"I used to be," Lemonpaw admitted, "but it doesn't matter so much anymore. I have a family now. Seeing my real family would only mess with that."

"I'm glad to hear it. Come on. Let's go back to camp," he declared, leading her away from the forest.

Lemonpaw trotted alongside him with her prey, happy and excited. As soon as she padded into camp, Raspberrypaw rushed up to her.

"Did you pass, Lemonpaw?! Did you pass?!"

Lemonpaw nodded. "How about you?"

Raspberrypaw nodded. Thymepaw opened his mouth, as if to speak, when Silverstar quickly made her way towards Lemonpaw.

"I must see you in my den *now,*" she ordered.

"What? Why?" Lemonpaw asked. She couldn't think of any reason why she could be in trouble.

Firelight glanced up at Silverstar with concern.

"No questions. This way, Lemonpaw," Silverstar repeated sternly.

Lemonpaw glanced back at her friends and mentors and followed Silverstar into her den. She had expected it to be empty, but the medicine cat, Ambershine, sat in the corner.

"What is this about?" Lemonpaw asked the leader.

"Sit," Silverstar commanded.

Lemonpaw followed her orders and sat down, gazing at the two she-cats.

"Why am I here?"

Silverstar glanced over at Ambershine, waiting for her to explain.

"I received a message from StarClan," Ambershine spoke.

"A message?" Lemonpaw asked.

"A prophecy," Ambershine revealed.

"Repeat the prophecy for her, Ambershine," Silverstar ordered.

Ambershine nodded. "This was the prophecy told to me: 'As the Moon's shine vanishes and the light burns out, another cat will be lost. Four will come, all the same, but with different stories. The four must unite and rescue the lost cat and themselves or else the Place of No Stars will gain a star.'"

"Why am I here?" Lemonpaw asked.

"Ambershine thinks you are a part of this prophecy," Silverstar explained.

"How?"

"With this prophecy, I also had a brief vision," Ambershine explained. "I saw you, Lemonpaw, but not just you alone. I saw three other cats that looked just like you."

"Huh?" Lemonpaw asked.

"It is odd, I know," Silverstar mewed. "But Ambershine swears this is the truth."

"But what does it even mean?" Lemonpaw wondered.

"We are trying to figure that out ourselves," Ambershine told her. "The Moon's shine must be Moonstar, but we do not know what a light burning out means or who this specific cat is. Four coming, all the same, must mean that...maybe there are four cats who look just like you."

"What? Is that even possible?" Lemonpaw asked.

"They are obviously not in this clan, but perhaps they may be located in other clans," Silverstar pointed out.

"Apparently you must come together with these three 'clones,' I guess you could call them, and rescue this lost cat. The Place of No Stars is obviously the Dark Forest. Perhaps you're keeping a StarClan cat, or a cat who is destined to die and move onto StarClan, from going to the Dark Forest. Perhaps you're changing the ways of an evil cat."

"But who is this mysterious cat?" Lemonpaw asked.

"It is all confusing, but we must not ignore this message. For now, Ambershine and I will work hard to decipher this prophecy. We will keep you updated, Lemonpaw. In the meantime, keep an eye out for the other three cats," Silverstar instructed.

Lemonpaw nodded as Silverstar escorted her out of her den. What had that all meant?

Chapter 39

Sunrise slept calmly. She was curled up near the windowsill, the quiet of night relaxing her as she slowly breathed in and out. She experienced pleasant dreams of herself in the forest as a clan cat, learning how to fight and hunt.

The pleasantness of this vision came to a halt as she awoke to a start, hearing the sound of something bounce off the window. Sunrise slowly opened her eyes, her pupils adjusting to the darkness of the room.

It was still night, and it didn't look like sunrise would occur for a little while longer. Curious at what this sound had been, Sunrise stood up and stretched, glancing out the window. She saw nothing.

Guessing it had not been anything at all, she laid back down, only to hear this noise again. Frustrated now, she stood back up and glanced out the window, once again not noticing anything in particular.

She paused for a moment, her heart racing as she watched a figure leap up and scratch the window. From the tiny second she had seen the figure, she guessed it had looked like a cat.

Her heart pounding viciously against her chest now, she glanced down, noticing the familiar frame of Fawn. Tilting her head, she glanced down, locking eyes with her friend.

Fawn begin to mew, and Sunrise assumed she wanted her to come out and greet her. Sunrise gave a quick nod and descended from her windowsill, coming towards the closed door of the bedroom.

She pawed at the bedroom door, hoping her master would come. He slept soundly though, and she began to scratch at the door. Still, he did not budge.

Sunrise began to mew now, and when he still did not wake, she

mewed louder. Suddenly, she heard him turn, and she mewed again, pawing at the door.

The boy, her owner, got up and groggily staggered forward towards the door, rubbing his eyes and yawning.

"What are you doing, Sunrise?" he asked tiredly.

Sunrise pawed at the door, and the boy sighed, opening the door.

"I don't know what you even need to do out there," he mumbled. Sunrise rubbed against him in gratitude and padded outside in the dark hallways of the house. The boy had gone back to bed, and she supposed she'd come back into his room later.

She slowly crept by the kitchen until she came to the cat door. She was relieved to find it had not been sealed off. She supposed there was really no need since Holly and Polly would not go outside unless forced and she slept in the boy's room at night.

Sunrise made her way outside, chilled by the cool air. With summer's warmth fading, the nights had gotten even colder, and she glanced around.

Fawn sat on top of her fence, her tail curled around the wooden post.

"Fawn?" Sunrise asked. "Why are you here?"

Fawn leapt down from fence and approached Sunrise slowly. She'd never pulled this sort of act before, making Sunrise worry.

"I need to talk to you," Fawn explained.

"Okay..."

"Let's head into my backyard," Fawn offered. Sunrise nodded and followed her up the fence, nearly slipping as she leapt up. If only Fawn could've waited until morning to speak to her.

Sunrise paused, watching a tiny glow in the distance. Sunrise was approaching, and already, the sky was no longer pitch black, but

more of a dark indigo.

"Couldn't this have waited until morning?" Sunrise asked as she followed Fawn into her backyard.

"No. Well, I suppose it could have, but I needed to talk to you," Fawn said.

"What is it?" Sunrise asked.

"I had a dream," Fawn spoke.

Sunrise tilted her head. What did this have to do with anything?

"Yes?"

"From StarClan."

"Go on," Sunrise urged.

"I had a dream from StarClan, but it wasn't a normal dream, Sunrise. A cat actually spoke to me...and you...you were in it!"

"I was in it?!" Sunrise gasped.

Fawn nodded.

"Why aren't you telling Anna about this?"

"We will," Fawn assured her. "But I wanted you to be the first to know."

"What happened in your dream?" Sunrise asked.

"Well, a cat approached me. She was white and glowed, an obvious cat of StarClan. Her eyes were like frosty ice, and she turned to me, knowing I was there. No cat has ever actually known I was there. And then, she spoke."

"Spoke what?"

"Strange words," Fawn responded. "It was a prophecy, I think, but I could barely understand it. Even more strangely, I can't get this

prophecy out of my head."

"What is it?" Sunrise asked.

" 'As the Moon's shine vanishes and the light burns out, another cat will be lost. Four will come, all the same, but with different stories. The four must unite and rescue the lost cat and themselves or else the Place of No Stars will gain a star.'"

"What?" Sunrise asked, confused.

"That's what I said. And then, I was shown a vision of you, Sunrise, but there were four of you."

"Four of me?"

"Yes, but I don't think they were clones of you. I mean, well, they seemed like it, but maybe there are three other cats that look exactly like you," Fawn hypothesized.

"We need to talk to Anna...now," Sunrise decided.

"But she's still sleeping!" Fawn protested.

"This seems important, Fawn. Maybe she'll know what this means and why I'm in your dream."

"If you think that's the best option," Fawn sighed. The sun was rising more now, showering a tiny bit of light upon them. Sunrise followed Fawn up the fence, and they walked down the familiar fenceline towards Anna's house.

When they reached the old she-cat's home, her backyard was empty. Sunrise felt disappointment surge within her, but she leapt down anyway.

"Are you sure we shouldn't wait until later?" Fawn asked.

Sunrise ignored her and approached the glass door that separated the inside of Anna's home to the backyard. She clawed at it, glancing through the home. Anna slept in the corner of the room, her tail curled around her chubby body.

"Anna!" Sunrise hissed.

The old she-cat's eyes opened, and she glanced around, closing her eyes again. Sunrise pawed at the door, and Anna pricked her ears. Catching sight of Sunrise, she stood up and lazily made her way to the door, slipping through the cat door.

"It's a bit early, Sunrise," Anna spoke quietly.

"Fawn needs to talk to you," Sunrise quickly said.

"What?"

"I had a dream, Anna," Fawn explained.

"Well, then why is Sunrise here? I'm happy to help you with your dream, but couldn't it have waited? And why did you have to wake Sunrise up, too?"

"Because Sunrise deserves to be here. She was in my dream," Fawn explained.

Anna chuckled. "This wasn't a StarClan dream then, was it?"

"No, it was," Fawn spoke. And then, she began to tell Anna of her dream, of the prophecy and the vision of Sunrise, or four of her, for that matter.

Anna paused for a moment.

"This is a big deal," she said at last.

"What does it mean?" Sunrise asked loudly.

"Calm down there, young one. A clan cat would be the better option, but if we wake Frog, he'll be furious," Anna explained.

"Forget it! I'll wake him!" Sunrise declared.

"Sunrise, wait!" Fawn called.

"HEY, FROG!" Sunrise yowled from the top of Anna's fence. "WE NEED TO TALK TO YOU!"

The tom was sleeping outside, and he jumped, turning towards Sunrise.

"Shut up, you kittypet!" he growled.

Fawn leapt up after Sunrise, knocking her away. The sky was nearly a light blue now, and rays of sunshine scattered across the backyard.

"Please, Frog. I've just been told a prophecy and we need the help of a clan cat, like yourself," Fawn begged.

"I'm not clan cat. Leave me alone," he grumbled.

This time, Anna leapt up, carrying her large weight with her. "Frog, I demand you come down here right now!"

Frog, frightened at this, froze. "Whatever you say," he grumbled, leaping onto the fence.

"How'd you do that?" Sunrise whispered to Anna.

"He's scared of me," she purred, laughing.

The four descended back into Anna's backyard, and Frog sat down, growling.

"What is this prophecy?" he grumbled.

Quickly, Fawn described her dream and the prophecy. Frog, like Anna, nodded and made no sound until Fawn had finished describing this event.

"That sure sounds like StarClan," Frog admitted.

"But why am I in it?" Sunrise asked.

"The Place of No Stars is the Dark Forest," Frog explained. "I do not know what moon is referring to or this magnificent light, but from what I can tell, if you saw four of Sunrise, perhaps there are three she-cats like her."

"That's precisely what I was thinking," Anna agreed.

"So there are clones of me?" Sunrise asked.

"Not clones. At least, I don't think so," Anna assured her. "But there are maybe cats who look like you. Either way, it's best we find one of these cats or keep our eyes out for one of them. Perhaps they'll have more information for us."

"And what about me?" Fawn asked.

"Tell us if you have any further dreams from StarClan. Perhaps they'll provide us with some more information. And if we haven't made any progress, we may have to dive into the forest ourselves."

"But you and Frog can't make it in there," Sunrise spoke.

"Who said I wanted to join you?" Frog grumbled. "It seems like you didn't even need my help."

"We did, Frog. Thank you," Anna purred. "You can leave now, if you want."

But Frog only grumbled and stayed.

"I meant you and Fawn, or perhaps you, Sunrise, will journey into the forest. After all, I think this prophecy is meant for you and about you."

"You think so?" Sunrise asked. "But I'm a kittypet! I don't even have clan blood."

"Perhaps," Anna began, "you are not the cat you think you are."

Sunrise paused and did not speak.

"We'll follow your advice, Anna," Fawn interrupted. "Come on, Sunrise. We should go back home."

"Good luck!" Anna called.

Sunrise followed Fawn, but Anna's wise words stung Sunrise. Was

she really not who she thought she was?

Chapter 40

Lifepaw awoke with excitement, wishing she could just scream. Unfortunately, other apprentices still slept, and she carefully snuck out of the den, the cool breeze of leaf-fall rubbing against her as she padded outside.

Today she would be performing her apprentice exam, and if she did well, today could be the day that she became a warrior!

She knew Tinypelt was probably still sleeping, but Lifepaw's excitement kept her from sleeping any longer. She would finally become a warrior today!

Grabbing a mouse from the fresh-kill pile, she sat down, wishing Goosepaw and his siblings could share in the excitement with her. Unfortunately, they wouldn't be warriors for another moon or so, leaving Lifepaw to experience warrior duties on her own.

As she nibbled at her mouse, worried thoughts became replaced by excited ones. She wondered if she truly was a ready to become a warrior. What if Tinypelt decided she wasn't? What if she had to keep grabbing moss for the elders?

She shook these thoughts away, knowing she had trained long and hard for this day. After all, Tinypelt had just told her the other day that she would be ready to become a warrior soon.

Tossing her half-eaten mouse aside, she no longer felt hungry but wished to begin right away. If only Tinypelt would wake up...

Lifepaw sat impatiently, her hair spiking up as she felt a tail touch her shoulder. Lifepaw spun around, coming to face to face with none other than her father. He stood in front of her, a gentle smile on his face. She hadn't noticed how old he looked recently. His green eyes had dulled, and he no longer had kit-like energy.

"H-Hi," she managed to speak up. Though she and her father had not gotten into a fight, they didn't speak to each other that often. She knew Patchfur was busy, and Lifepaw had her own friends, but she still longed for some kind of relationship with him. Mousestripe spoke to Lifepaw at times, as did Stormnight and Graytail, but it seemed like her family relationships had all fallen apart.

"I, um, came to wish you good luck today," Patchfur spoke quietly.

"Oh, thanks," Lifepaw replied. She expected him to leave, but he strayed a bit longer.

"I'm sure you'll do well, so I'll see you at the ceremony when I come back from patrols," Patchfur explained.

"Okay, see you then," Lifepaw spoke, noticing Tinypelt had just left the warriors den.

But Patchfur did not leave.

"You-you remind me a lot of Shinypelt," he admitted.

Lifepaw nodded, her eyes following Tinypelt. "Yes, I get that a lot."

"You've been told you look like her, but I think you act a lot like her too," Patchfur explained. What was that supposed to mean?

Lifepaw nodded once more, a thin silence forming between them.

"I should probably tell you--"

But Lifepaw noticed Tinypelt glancing around, looking for her, so she cut her father off. "You can tell me later," Lifepaw explained. "I see Tinypelt waiting for me."

"Oh, yes, of course," Patchfur agreed.

Lifepaw ran off, waving good-bye to her father. He waved

his tail back, but he looked sad almost. She really wished she had a better relationship with the tom. He'd been growing distant from her as she aged.

"Are you ready?" Tinypelt asked as Lifepaw approached her.

Lifepaw nodded. "As ready as I'll ever be."

"Good. Your exam will begin soon," Tinypelt explained, leading her into the woods. Lifepaw followed behind excitedly, her heart pounding. She had faith in herself, and that was enough to allow her to do well during the exam.

Tinypelt paused by a nearby tree and sat down, curling her thin gray tail around her tiny feet.

Lifepaw stood beside her, hesitant on whether or not she should sit.

"Sit," Tinypelt instructed.

Lifepaw obeyed, sitting down across from her mentor. Tinypelt grinned at her, allowing the clenching feeling in Lifepaw's stomach to cease. If Tinypelt had faith in her, she had to well, right?

"Today marks six moons since you've become an apprentice. You've trained long and hard, Lifepaw, and it's been a privilege mentoring you. Before you have the opportunity to become a warrior, however, you must complete the exam."

Lifepaw nodded, attentively listening.

"It's your job to catch as much prey during the day, and when you return, we'll test your battle moves. Are you ready?"

Lifepaw nodded.

Tinypelt let out a tiny smile. "Good. Meet me here when the sun's rays reflect this tree."

Lifepaw nodded, taking one look at the tree. She then

glanced at Tinypelt one last time and made her way further into the woods, wandering around. Her heart pounded, but she told herself to focus. She needed to prove she could do this.

She wandered for awhile until she heard a tiny squeak. Turning to her right, she noticed a tiny gray mouse had crouched by a tree. It nibbled on some sort of nut, not noticing Lifepaw.

Lifepaw grinned and crouched down, slowly moving forward. The mouse still nibbled away, its beady eyes focused on the nut in its paws. As Lifepaw moved closer, the mouse looked up. There was a split second in between where they locked eyes. Then, Lifepaw pounced.

The mouse squeaked in surprise, and Lifepaw outstretched her paws. The mouse wiggled past them, just missing her grasp. Lifepaw gasped, chasing after the mouse. It disappeared into a hole moments later, leaving Lifepaw to only stand in shock.

She had failed to catch a mouse, the simplest of prey. Maybe she wasn't made up to be a warrior after all.

Lifepaw kept looking for prey, but her failure kept popping up in her mind.

I can't even catch a stupid mouse, she thought. She tried to push these thoughts away, but she couldn't. She sat down, a tear running down her cheek. And soon enough, she wasn't crying about the mouse anymore.

She sat pouting as she thought of her father, who never spoke to her. She thought of her friends, who would not become warriors for a bit longer. She thought of Mousestripe, who would most likely be retiring to the elders den any day. She thought of Stormpelt and Graytail, the two toms now preoccupied with their new families. And lastly, she thought of her mother. She thought of the mother she had heard of, but never had spoken to. She had no mother who cleaned her fur before ceremonies, no mother who used to allow her to sleep in her nest.

Lifepaw wiped tears from her eyes, feeling like a failure.

How could she break down during a crucial time period?

Suddenly, she heard a scurrying of feet, and she glanced up, noticing a squirrel by a nearby tree. She turned, not wanting to catch it, but she knew she had to go on. This was her exam, and it was her job to complete it to become a warrior.

Feeling motivated, she crept towards the squirrel and leapt, catching it successfully in her paws. She quickly killed it as it struggled, and then she buried the dead squirrel by the tree she had caught it.

For some reason, her eyes were no longer watery, and she felt pride burst within her. She could do this, after all. She was not a failure, and she would make all of her family proud.

This encouragement allowed Lifepaw to hunt throughout the rest of the day. By the time the sun's rays had hit the tree she and Tinypelt had sat at that morning, she had caught a total of ten pieces of prey. She had never caught so much prey in her lifetime before!

When she told Tinypelt this, Tinypelt's eyes widened.

"Ten pieces! In leaf-fall!" she gasped. "That's amazing, Lifepaw. I've never known an apprentice to catch that much prey, especially during this season. Why, I caught four pieces of prey when I became a warrior."

"Does this mean I pass that portion of the exam?" Lifepaw asked, a wide smile on her face.

Tinypelt nodded. "Yes. I'm very proud of you. Your mother would be too."

There it was. Her mother again.

"Now, we test your ability to fight!" Tinypelt declared.

Lifepaw nodded, facing the she-cat. Tinypelt was a bit smaller than Lifepaw, which was a surprise considering Lifepaw was one of the tinier she-cats in her clan. Still, she supposed that's how

Tinypelt had gotten her name.

"Ready?" Tinypelt asked.

Lifepaw didn't reply but sprang, pushing Tinypelt to the earth. Tinypelt gasped in surprise, pushing Lifepaw off of her. Lifepaw was knocked to the ground, but she quickly came back up, knocking Tinypelt away before she had the chance to pin Lifepaw down. Lifepaw quickly swept Tinypelt's paws from under her feet, causing the she-cat to fall.

They fought for awhile, Lifepaw trying to demonstrate all the battle moves she had learned. In most cases, they helped her get out of several traps Tinypelt had laid for her, and soon enough, she was pinning Tinypelt down again, her paws planted firmly in Tinypelt's shoulders.

"Very good," Tinypelt said at last. Lifepaw got off of the she-cat, grinning.

"Congratulations, Lifepaw. You'll be becoming a warrior."

Lifepaw screeched, causing birds to fly from the trees.

"Quiet down," Tinypelt warned.

"Sorry," Lifepaw whispered. "I'm just so excited! I've been dreaming about this day forever."

Tinypelt grinned. "It has been an honor mentoring you. You know, people say you look like your mother, but when I was mentoring you, I thought of Patchfur, my brother."

Lifepaw tilted her head. Normally everyone commented on how she was similar to her mother. This was the first time anyone had ever said different.

"Thank you for teaching me the skills I needed to learn," Lifepaw said in gratitude, dipping her head. She ignored Tinypelt's last comment, refusing to acknowledge it.

"Let's head back to camp then," Tinypelt declared.

Lifepaw nodded, coming to the SnowClan camp with Tinypelt in a matter of minutes.

"Go get some rest. You'll be doing vigil tonight," Tinypelt advised her.

Lifepaw nodded, wandering off to the apprentice den. Immediately, Goosepaw and Marshpaw ran up to her.

"Are you becoming a warrior?!" Marshpaw exclaimed.

"Yes!" Lifepaw gasped in response.

Goosepaw grinned. "I'm proud of you, Lifepaw."

"Thanks," she purred. "Well, I've got to rest before the ceremony and vigil."

"Good idea," Goosepaw agreed.

Lifepaw never made it to the apprentice den though. Standing near the den was Spiritheart, the medicine cat.

"Lifepaw, can you come with me, please?" he asked.

Lifepaw tilted her head but obeyed. She had expected to head towards the medicine cat den, but he led her all the way to Thornstar's den.

"She's here, Thornstar," Spiritheart called from outside.

Lifepaw froze. What was going on?

Thornstar peeked his head out, worry clouding his eyes. "Yes, bring her inside."

Lifepaw carefully padded into the leader's den, Spiritheart following.

"I don't understand. What's going on?" Lifepaw asked.

"Explain, Thornstar," Spiritheart offered.

"Lifepaw, I've already told Spiritheart this, but I received a dream from StarClan," he explained.

"Okay..."

"And they revealed a prophecy," Thornstar continued. "A prophecy that I believe has something to do with you."

"What?" Lifepaw asked. "Me?"

"Tell her the prophecy," Spiritheart suggested.

Thornstar sighed and shut his eyes, speaking, "As the Moon's shine vanishes and the light burns out, another cat will be lost. Four will come, all the same, but with different stories. The four must unite and rescue the lost cat and theirselves or else the Place of No Stars will gain a star."

"What does that even mean?" Lifepaw asked.

Thornstar ignored her. "After hearing this prophecy, I saw a vision of you, Lifepaw. But I did not just see you, but four identical figures of you. At first, I believed it was Shinypelt because you look so much like her, but judging from the prophecy, I believe this is more about you. Still, I think Shinypelt is a part of it too."

"What? Why would my mother be a part of the prophecy?"

Spiritheart winced. What were they keeping from her?

"There is an old prophecy relating to your mother," Thornstar explained.

"What? My mother was a part of a prophecy?"

"It doesn't matter. But this is describing Moonstar and MoonClan here. Perhaps we are not fully safe from Moonstar. Anyway, this prophecy is all confusing to me. I believe there may be three cats who look like you, Lifepaw. The prophecy claims four will come."

"That's insane," Lifepaw spat.

"Watch your mouth," Spiritheart warned. He was only trying to advise her to be polite, but Lifepaw didn't care. She had known Thornstar from a very young age since he was Mousestripe's mate. She felt like she could say whatever to him.

"Insane, but perhaps not. Maybe it's time you speak to your father," Thornstar advised.

"What? Why? What does that even have to do with this?"

"It's only a suggestion. You may leave for now, Lifepaw. I know you need to prepare for your warrior ceremony. Keep in mind what I said though, and if you see a similar-looking cat, then let Spiritheart or me know immediately."

"Okay," Lifepaw sighed, exiting the den. She thought she had always known about her past, where she came from, who her family was, but now, she felt like everything she knew was perhaps only a portion of the greater mystery surrounding her existence.

Chapter 41

"CATS OF OUR TRIBE!" Oak yowled from the center of their small camp. The cats gathered beside him, and Salmon stood near her father, shaking from excitement and nervousness.

"Salmon has completed her first part of initiation. In order to fulfill the second, it is time she fights me. Unlike other initiations, winning against me will declare Salmon rightful heir and leader to the tribe!"

Cats roared, excited. Oak grinned, then turned to Salmon.

"Are you ready?" he asked.

Salmon nodded.

The cats began to move out, creating a small clearing for Salmon and Oak to wrestle in. Salmon stood near the edge of one side, facing her father. She took a breath, telling herself this was only her father. Still, he was the leader of the tribe, a far better fighter than her.

I must fight like I mean it, Salmon thought. *I must fight to become leader. I must fight for Cherry Blossom.*

There was silence as the roar of the crowd died down, leaving Salmon to face her father. Berry stood near the side, glancing around.

"Begin," she said simply.

Before Salmon could react, Oak was already racing towards her, his feet moving at speeds Salmon had never seen before. Quickly, she ducked under him and ran the other way, him still chasing after her.

Knowing she could not run forever, she turned around and faced him, shutting her eyes. His body slammed against hers, and

she was forced to the ground, gasping for breath. Oak pinned her down, his claws sharply held into her shoulders. Salmon had heard it said that some died during this event. She did not want to be another one of those victims.

Growling, she pushed Oak off of her with all her might and sprang at him, extending her sharp claws and landing on his back. Oak yowled as she sank her claws into his back. For a moment, she was frightened for her father. She did not want to kill him.

This moment of weakness, however, was used to Oak's benefit, and he knocked her off, causing her to sprawl onto the floor. Salmon stood up, her legs shaking. Her heart was racing quickly, and she gulped as her father came near her.

She sprang to the side, the tip of his claw touching her foot. Though she did not lose balance and fall, there was a stinging on her leg, and she looked down to see blood soaking into the white fur that covered there.

Angry, she leapt over her father, and before he could turn, she swiped at his legs, causing him to fall backwards. Salmon leapt on top of him before he could get up, pinning the tom down with all her might. Oak was clever though, and he used his back legs to claw at her stomach.

Salmon fell off and Oak rolled over, turning to face Salmon. He pinned her down before she could move, and she gulped. Never before had she seen such fierceness and determination in her father's eyes. It was as if he did not want her to win. She knew just as well as the others that he was not going to go easy on her just because she was his daughter.

Salmon struggled beneath her father's grip, hissing at him. She tried to push him off, but it was no use. Cats were beginning to fall silent, and Berry eyed them. The fight would end if Salmon could not fight any longer.

Salmon shut her eyes. *Cherry Blossom, Mother, if you're there, please help me now.*

Salmon wasn't sure if it was actually her mother, or the motivation to fight for her mother, that allowed her to knock Oak off. Oak, astounded by her strength, came near her again. Salmon swung her paw across his cheek and knocked him over, Oak hitting the ground hard.

She pierced her claws into his shoulder, blood coating her claws. And for once, she saw fear in Oak. His eyes glistened with both surprise and fear. When she noticed blood was starting to seep into his fur, she loosened her grip a little.

"I resign," Oak said at last.

Salmon let go, cats cheering all around her. A wide grin appeared on her face as cats cheered for her. She turned towards her father, who smiled weakly.

"You fought well," Oak told her quietly.

"Thank you. Are you hurt?" Salmon asked, noticing claw marks all over his pelt.

"I will recover. How about you?"

Salmon had cuts and scratches here and there, the largest wound on her foot. Her wound from fighting the fox had reopened too, but it was nothing Berry couldn't fix up. Besides, her excitement seemed to numb any pain that she felt.

"QUIET DOWN! QUIET DOWN!" Oak shouted as cats cheered. Once they fell silent, Salmon stood near her father, proudly facing the cats.

"Salmon has proved herself worthy of becoming a full member of our tribe. It is with my great honor to bestow upon her the title of an official hunter and fighter of our pack!" Oak shouted.

Cats cheered, and Salmon blushed. Cats had never shown her this much attention before.

Oak then cleared his throat, clearly wishing to say more.

"I've got to say," Oak began. "When your mother came to us with you, I wondered if it was a joke. You were a but a tiny little kitten, and I never thought you were worthy of becoming leader. But after Cherry Blossom's death, I knew very well you had the opportunity of this position. You acted so strong, I so weak. Your training and commitment has truly proven your loyalty to us and ability to lead and act strongly. Cherry Blossom would be proud of you."

Cats dipped their heads in honor of their former queen.

"So, it is an honor then to also name you heir to leading this group of cats," Oak said calmly.

Cats screeched and jumped around in excitement, bowing down to Salmon. A shiver went down Salmon's spine, and she dipped her head back to the cats, glad she would be leading them someday.

"I'm not saying it'll be anytime soon," Oak spoke. "But when I do pass on, I know this tribe will be in the best paws. I have faith in you, Salmon. Serve us well."

"I will," Salmon replied. She then faced the cats. "I will serve all of you well!"

Cats shouted, and Salmon grinned. As the crowd began to disperse, Berry approached Oak and Salmon.

"It's best we get you to my den then," Berry decided. "Your wound reopened, Salmon."

"Sorry about that," Salmon told Berry, following her to the den. As they walked, she was stopped by Storm.

"Come to congratulate me?" she joked.

"As if," Storm growled. "I didn't think you had the strength to take down Oak," he said quietly as Oak and Berry disappeared into the den.

"Oh, please," Salmon growled. "What satisfaction do you get

from teasing me? We all know you want to be heir, but you're stubborn, stuck-up, and annoying."

Storm's eyes flashed with anger. "At least my mentor didn't go easy on me."

Salmon gasped. "Oak did not go easy on me! I've never seen him fight that way before!"

"Please. It was obvious," Storm purred.

"Why, you little—"

"Salmon! Congratulations!" Mouse shouted, Honey following behind her.

"Just remember what I said," Storm spoke quietly, leaving her to chat with her friends.

"It was so neat seeing you fight Oak!" Honey exclaimed.

"A real spectacle!" Mouse agreed.

"Thanks, guys. I better be heading to Berry's den though," she explained, glancing down at the dried blood clustered to her pelt.

"Oh, of course," Honey agreed. "We'll catch up with you later, Salmon."

"Bye!" Mouse called, wandering off.

Salmon smiled and entered into the den, finding Berry just finishing up on Oak's wounds.

"All right, Oak, you're looking good," Berry said at last as she applied the last bit of cobwebs.

"Thanks. I didn't realize my daughter had such sharp claws," Oak purred, smiling at Salmon. It was meant to be a compliment, but Salmon felt guilty for harming her father.

"I'll catch up with you later," Oak told Salmon. "We have much to discuss."

Salmon nodded, now alone in the den with Berry. Silence hung in the air as Berry once again applied the familiar herbs and cobwebs. After placing some marigold on Salmon's wound, she winced, a stinging sensation taking over her body.

"It's fine," Berry coaxed her. She applied one last set of cobwebs, and Salmon sighed in relief.

"I hope you haven't forgotten what I've told you," Berry whispered.

Salmon did not need to ask. She knew Berry meant the prophecy that Salmon had already chosen to ignore.

"Of course not," Salmon replied, standing up.

"Good," Berry said, nodding. Salmon waved good-bye, noticing Berry seemed to be unconvinced. Salmon just wished Berry would let it go.

Chapter 42

The clan was bursting with excitement as Lemonpaw made her way through camp. In a short period of time, there would be six new warriors of NightClan. Just the thought of it made her paws tingle with excitement.

She tried to ignore the meeting with Silverstar and Ambershine, but for some reason, it kept fogging up her mind.

"Why couldn't they have told me after the ceremony?" she groaned, her excitement being replaced with worry and thoughts of what this strange prophecy meant.

"Lemonpaw! Lemonpaw!" Raspberrypaw called.

Lemonpaw turned, spotting her dark ginger-furred friend.

"What did Silverstar want?" Raspberrypaw asked. Thymepaw trotted along behind her, tilting his head as if he were wondering as well.

Lemonpaw shuffled her paws. She knew she could not tell her friends the strange prophecy as much as she wanted to.

"She...was just wondering how Firelight did in mentoring me," Lemonpaw decided. She had to admit, it was a pretty good excuse.

"Ah, so she finally caught up to his bad teaching methods?" Raspberrypaw asked.

"Not quite," Lemonpaw spoke, distracted by the prophecy ringing in her ears.

"ALL CATS OLD ENOUGH TO CATCH THEIR OWN PREY JOIN BENEATH THE ROCK FOR A CLAN MEETING!" Silverstar yowled, her strong voice echoing throughout the camp.

"Well, that's us. Good luck," Raspberrypaw called to Lemonpaw.

Lemonpaw glanced around, then followed after Raspberrypaw and Thymepaw, coming up to the large rock that stood in camp. Koipaw, Windpaw, and Mangopaw were already racing up the rock to stand beside Silverstar.

Lemonpaw padded up the rock last behind Thymepaw, glancing at the crowd. Cats stood excitedly to welcome them as new apprentices. From afar, Lemonpaw could see Frostflight and

Hailfrost smiling proudly at her, their four kits beside them. Firelight stood closer to the rock with Snowdrop, grinning at Lemonpaw. Lemonpaw grinned back nervously, turning her attention towards Silverstar.

"Cats of NightClan," she began, the crowd quieting down. "Today we are gathered here to welcome six new warriors into our clan." She turned towards the apprentices, speaking slowly, "I call upon my warrior ancestors to look upon these six cats. They have trained hard to follow your noble code, and I grant them to you as warriors in return. Windpaw," she began.

And Lemonpaw stood nervously, watching as each of the apprentices began to receive their warrior names and received acknowledgement from their mentors.

She stood, suddenly nervous, watching as Windpaw became Windpelt, Koipaw became Koilight, Mangopaw became Mangosong. Coming to her friends now, Lemonpaw stood proudly as Raspberrypaw was given the name of Raspberryblaze. Lemonpaw smiled at her friend, noticing Raspberryblaze's look of excitement as she received her warrior name.

"Thymepaw," Silverstar spoke now, nearly coming to Lemonpaw. "Do you promise to uphold the warrior code with all your life, even if it means giving up your life for the clan?"

Once again, Thymepaw opened his mouth, as if he were to speak. Realizing he could not, he closed it and nodded. Lemonpaw had assumed he'd made no effort to speak since his muteness. She wondered why he suddenly felt he could speak again.

"Then by the power of StarClan, I give you your new name of Thymewhisker," she spoke softly.

Thymewhisker grinned, turning to Lemonpaw in excitement. She smiled at the tom she loved, glancing at the crowd to see Daisyfeather and Possumeye smiling proudly at their five kits.

Silverstar turned to Lemonpaw now, her amber eyes fixed on Lemonpaw. For some reason, looking at Silverstar reminded Lemonpaw of the prophecy, and she wondered if Silverstar was staring at her this way to remind Lemonpaw not to forget it.

"Lemonpaw," Silverstar spoke. "You have trained hard and long, and I know you surely will be a good warrior. Firelight," Silverstar called, glancing below. Lemonpaw watched as her mentor made his way forward, his green eyes gazing at the NightClan

leader.

"Yes, Silverstar?" he asked.

"Do you believe Lemonpaw is capable of being a warrior of NightClan?"

"With all my heart," Firelight agreed, gazing at Lemonpaw and winking. She smiled, turning back to Silverstar.

"Then by the power of StarClan, I give you your warrior name of Lemonfur," she proclaimed.

"WINDPELT! KOILIGHT! MANGOSONG! RASPBERRYBLAZE! THYMEWHISKER! LEMONFUR!" the clan shouted, their cheers echoing throughout the camp.

Lemonfur glanced down, watching Frostflight and Hailfrost chant. The four apprentices chanted near them, jumping up and down for their sister's new warrior name.

Once the crowd died down and began to disperse, Lemonfur padded down the rock beside Raspberryblaze and Thymewhisker, grinning to herself.

"You look happy," Raspberryblaze purred.

"I am!" Lemonfur exclaimed. "We're warriors now!"

"I know," Raspberryblaze said. "It's weird to think we won't be going to lessons every day with our mentors."

Thymewhisker nodded beside her.

"I see Possumeye and Daisyfeather, Thymewhisker!" Raspberryblaze told her brother. "I'll catch up with you later, Lemonfur! We've still got vigil together!"

Lemonfur nodded, watching as Raspberryblaze ran off, Thymewhisker following behind her slowly.

"There's my young kit!" she heard.

Lemonfur turned, watching Frostflight make her way to her. Oddly now, Lemonfur was the same size as Frostflight, and she embraced her adoptive mother, grinning.

"I knew you could do it," Hailfrost purred, gazing at her proudly.

"Thank you. I could not have made it this far without you both," Lemonfur admitted. "Even though you're not my biological parents, I still love you all the same."

Frostflight grinned, tears in her eyes. "Oh, I remember nursing you as a kit!" She sighed, gazing back up at Lemonfur. "I suppose those days are over now. Soon, you'll be having your own kits!"

"Frostflight!" Lemonfur gasped.

"I'm just teasing," Frostflight responded, laughing.

"Lemonfur! Lemonfur!" Pearpaw called, her three siblings following behind.

"You were amazing up there!" Troutpaw exclaimed.

"Congratulations!" Spotpaw squeaked.

Lemonfur smiled warmly. "Soon, you'll all be going on patrols with me. Just a few moons of training for each of you."

"I want to become a warrior now!" Desertpaw complained.

"Oh, hush," Frostflight snapped. "You'll be a warrior soon enough. It takes a lot of work."

Lemonfur nodded. "Put your best effort into training, and you'll be a warrior soon," she advised them.

"Will we still see you, Lemonfur?" Troutpaw asked sadly.

"Of course," Lemonfur purred. "I'll most likely be on patrols with you, and I'll still see you around. Soon, you'll be warriors with me. We'll all sleep in the same den, go on the same patrols...It'll be fun!"

"Your mentors are waiting," Hailfrost observed, speaking to his kits.

"Aw, we want to talk to Lemonfur some more!" Spotpaw complained.

Lemonfur rolled her eyes. "If you want to become a warrior, you better start training now," she told them.

Pearpaw nodded, waving good-bye. Her three siblings ran off behind her, and Lemonfur smiled warmly, waving good-bye to her siblings and parents.

As she made her way further into camp, she bumped into Firelight.

"Hey, good job," Firelight congratulated her.

"I couldn't have done it without your help," she admitted, gazing down and blushing.

"I'm proud of you," he purred. "I'll see you around."

"See you!" Lemonfur called, waving good-bye to her mentor. Though in a way, he wasn't her mentor anymore. Firelight was a friend, a father-figure, someone who would remain in her life. She smiled warmly, jumping as a tail tapped her shoulder.

She spun around, noticing Thymewhisker.

"Thymewhisker!" she gasped, catching her breath. "You scared me!"

Thymewhisker locked eyes with Lemonfur, opening his mouth. Out of it came a quiet, almost a whisper. "Lemonfur," he said.

Lemonfur froze. "T-Thymewhisker? You're speaking!" she exclaimed, knowing she had heard his words correctly.

Thymewhisker cleared his throat and nodded. "I am," he confirmed. This time, his voice was stronger.

His voice sounded odd to Lemonfur. The only time she had heard him speak was when he was a kit. Now, his voice was much deeper and stronger, but it still contained the fragile warmth and softness that it had before.

"I-I can't believe this!" Lemonfur exclaimed. "I thought you'd be mute forever! How?!"

"My voice returned a moon ago," he explained, his voice now normal.

"A moon ago?! Why did you keep it from me?"

"I always tried out my voice, whether Bluefur told me to or not. About a moon ago, I realized I could whisper again. I told Bluefur, and we began voice exercises while we also signed. After awhile, we stopped signing all together and worked on my voice," he explained. "I wanted to speak immediately to you, to Raspberryblaze, to everyone, but Bluefur told me I had to wait until my voice got stronger."

Lemonfur nodded, amazed.

"Yesterday, Bluefur told me my voice was strong enough that I could use it regularly again. I could've spoken today, but I didn't."

"Thymewhisker, you could've spoken at the warrior ceremony! Why did you wait?! The whole clan could've heard you speak again!" Lemonfur exclaimed.

"I wanted you to be the first to know," he explained. "We've grown so close these past couple of moons. I wanted you to hear my voice first, not my siblings, not my parents, but you, Lemonfur. I love you."

It was even more beautiful hearing him say than signing it.

"I love you too," she purred, nuzzling him. "I can't believe this though. StarClan has granted a miracle!"

Thymewhisker smiled warmly. "I also came to ask you...to ask you if you would be my mate."

Lemonfur froze. She always knew this moment was coming,

but she did not expect it to come so soon. For a second or two, she doubted herself, wondering if Thymewhisker really was the right choice. But then she remembered them as kits, she remembered the river, she remembered how devastated she had been. All that was gone now...All of it was resolved.

"Yes," she agreed. "Yes, I'll be your mate," she purred.

"Great," Thymewhisker replied. "Come on! It's time to share my voice with the others!"

Lemonfur laughed, following after him. Her mind drifted away from the prophecy, only focused now on the beautiful life ahead of her.

Chapter 43

Sunrise did not leave the house three days after Fawn's strange dream and message. Every time she got close to the door, she would stiffen and turn the other way, not wanting to face Fawn and Anna and Frog. For some reason, it seemed everything had changed now, for worse or for better.

For three days, Sunrise remained indoors, refusing to go outside even with Holly and Polly. The boy who cared for her had grown concern, and Sunrise had been forced to go to the vet, where it was declared she was healthy and perhaps was only growing accustomed to remaining indoors.

After that visit, Sunrise hoped no more would come, but she could not be certain. She pondered for three days, wondering what this strange prophecy meant. Never in her life had she encountered a cat who looked like her, and if she was to look, then where? Would searching the woods be an option?

And so Sunrise became a victim of Holly and Polly's harassment again. They were the meanest in the morning. Sunrise was usually with Fawn at that time, but now, she didn't want to so much look out a window.

Sunrise was only spared from their harassment during naptime and their forced exercising. And when the two sisters slept, Sunrise would watch them carefully. She'd notice their tiny claws, their pudgy bellies, their markings.

Then Sunrise would glance at herself, noticing aspects she had not noticed before. She noticed her claws were longer and sharper than the others, curving in an odd manner. She noticed how her ears were longer and were more sharp at the tip. She noticed how her nose could pick up scents better than Holly and Polly's after they were unable to detect that their breakfast was ready the day before. She noticed her eyes were sharper, as were her teeth.

Perhaps it was all in Sunrise's head, but she began wondering if maybe she truly did possess clan cat blood. It was a silly thought, but Sunrise had not noticed until now the differences between her and her sisters.

They look different from me, that's all, Sunrise thought. She assumed they resembled her mother more than Sunrise. But then, Sunrise, with a keen memory, remembered how even her other siblings—Snowflake, Hazelnut, Tiger—they had not had these characteristics.

When her head felt like it would explode, Sunrise calmed down, telling herself that she had been born a kittypet, and that was what she'd always be. This newfound prophecy had only poisoned her mind with stupid thoughts of clan cats and warriors.

"Perhaps they have the wrong cat," Sunrise whispered to herself, standing up to face the outside world. Taking a deep breath, she slipped through the cat door, immediately feeling the cold presence of autumn.

She could smell the crispness of the wind and chill from the forest. She smiled and closed her eyes, glad to be back outside.

"Sunrise, is that you?!" came a gasp.

Sunrise turned, immediately facing Fawn. Fawn sat on her fence, her tail swooped around the wooden post.

"I've been waiting here day and night for you!" Fawn exclaimed, leaping down from the fence. "What happened? Did you get sick? Trip to the vet? Are you hurt?"

Sunrise laughed, shoving Fawn away as she frantically tried to inspect Sunrise.

"I'm fine," Sunrise assured Fawn. "I just needed some time away from everything, that's all."

"It's about the prophecy, isn't it?" Fawn asked.

Sunrise looked down and nodded slowly, refusing to make

eye contact with the light brown tabby.

"Sunrise, it's not a big deal," Fawn spoke, but Sunrise could detect lies in her words.

"I know. It's just...I've always wanted to be a clan cat, learn about them, that sort of thing. And then it was somewhat destiny meeting you, Fawn. You got to dream about clan cats, learn about them! I always felt left out," Sunrise sighed, drooping her tail. "But now I'm a part of this prophecy, and I wonder, 'Who am I? Am I really a kittypet? Why me?'"

"Sunrise, I didn't know this," Fawn replied quietly.

"It's just, you were always so special with your clan cat-ness. But me? I just dragged along for fun," Sunrise replied.

"But you're part of a prophecy now, Sunrise. This is also your life now too."

"Who cares about the prophecy?!" Sunrise spat. "What does it even mean?"

"I don't know what it means, but you're vital to it, Sunrise. StarClan did not make a mistake," Fawn explained.

"You're talking like a clan cat yourself, Fawn! But we're all kittypets! Maybe we shouldn't even look into this!"

"Sunrise, is something troubling you?" Fawn asked. "You're never this rude..."

"I've been thinking, Fawn. Why am I in this prophecy? Why do I like clan cats so much? Why can I pull off stunts like them? Am I really a kittypet?"

Fawn rolled her eyes. "Sunrise, you are who you believe you are. You may have been born a kittypet, but how you choose to live your life depends."

"So you're saying I should join a clan?" Sunrise asked.

"No!" Fawn quickly replied. She bit her lip, then continued. "What I'm saying is that you work too hard trying to identify yourself. Clan cats have always been of interest to you, and now you're a part of this mysterious prophecy. Maybe you'll have an exciting adventure soon. Don't spend your life believing you'll always be a dull kittypet."

"Thanks, Fawn," Sunrise replied. "I guess none of us are really normal."

Fawn laughed. "I guess not. Me with the dreams, you the prophecy, Anna and Frog with clan experiences. I guess we aren't really kittypets after all."

"Sorry for being so rude," Sunrise sighed, glancing down at her paws.

"It's okay. I remember the frustration and horror when my dreams appeared. I also wondered if I was really a clan cat, even though I'd been born a kittpet. I guess StarClan just has a plan for all cats, even if they aren't in the clans," Fawn admitted.

"Yeah, well, they certainly do have an odd way of showing it," Sunrise sighed.

"How's Holly and Polly?" Fawn asked, trying to depart from the subject. Sunrise still wanted to cling onto it though. She wanted to ask more questions, tell Fawn more, but she knew the conversation had come to a close.

"Oh, fat and annoying as ever. They get the fun lives," Sunrise joked.

"Yes, dragging my belly around and mewing for food seems fun," Fawn responded, laughing.

"Ah, well, they get to harass me too."

"Why did they even come with you?" Fawn asked.

"It wasn't my decision," Sunrise explained. "Sometimes, I have this fantasy where I run off and leave them behind. But then I

remember you guys, and the boy who cares for me, and I know I have to stay. Holly and Polly will be cats I'll always have to deal with."

Fawn grinned. "Well, I'm glad we talked. I'm heading over to Anna's. Want to come?"

Sunrise shook her head. "I think I'll stay out here for a little. Maybe I'll nap in the shade."

"Okay," Fawn replied, smiling.

As she leapt onto the fence, Sunrise's heart leapt.

"Fawn!" she called out unexpectedly.

Fawn spun around, facing her friend.

"Yes, Sunrise?" she asked.

"Do-do you think we'd maybe visit a clan one day?" Sunrise asked. It was a silly fantasy, but she had wondered this since she was a young kitten.

"Maybe, Sunrise," Fawn purred. She turned around and continued walking, mumbling, "Maybe..."

Chapter 44

Lifepaw sulked around camp as cats prepared for her warrior ceremony. She knew she should be happy, but the meeting with Thornstar had put her in a bad mood. Who was he to go around and tell her what to think? What secrets were they keeping from her? She was just an ordinary cat, who was known for being motherless. She was not special in anyone's eyes.

"Hey, Lifepaw!" Goosepaw called, running up to Lifepaw. It seemed he had noticed her lack of energy.

"You okay?" he asked.

Lifepaw bit her lip, wanting to tell him all about the prophecy, but she kept it shut for some reason. "I'm fine. I'm just nervous, that's all."

"Well, your ceremony will be in a few minutes. It's not like Thornstar can change his mind anytime soon. You should be glad," Goosepaw advised.

"I am. I guess I'll just miss spending time with you and Marshpaw and Ripplepaw," Lifepaw lied. Of course she'd miss them, but the sadness seemed to cover up the other issue bothering her.

"We'll be warriors in a moon or so. Well, Ripplepaw won't get her full medicine cat title for a little while longer, but it'll be a short wait, you'll see. Plus, you'll get to go on all these patrols with your father," Goosepaw pointed out.

Lifepaw grinned. She really did love Goosepaw for trying to be optimistic all the time and help her out. She was glad to have such a lovely tom in her life.

"I love you," she replied.

Goosepaw looked confused as to why this comment just

came out of nowhere, but he smiled. "I love you, too." Before he could ask anything else, Thornstar's yowl echoed loudly throughout the camp.

"ALL CATS OLD ENOUGH TO CATCH THEIR OWN PREY JOIN BENEATH THE ROCK FOR A CLAN MEETING!" he yowled.

"Better go. I'll talk to you later," Lifepaw called to Goosepaw.

He nodded, waving his blue tail as she padded away. Coming through the crowd and padding up the rock, she smiled, watching as cats gathered forward. She had to ignore Thornstar's prophecy for now. This was her moment, and she'd never experience this moment every again.

Looking down below, she saw her father gathering, as well as Mousestripe, Stormnight, and Graytail, all looking up proudly at her. Near the back sat Goosepaw, Marshpaw, and Ripplepaw, the three seated next to Blueocean.

"Cats of SnowClan," Thornstar began, quieting the crowd. "I call you all here together to celebrate the occasion of Lifepaw's conversion into a warrior." He smiled weakly at Lifepaw, then glanced up. "I call upon my warrior ancestors to look upon this apprentice. She has trained hard to follow your noble code, and I grant her to you as a warrior in return. Tinypelt," he spoke.

Tinypelt padded forward, smiling at Lifepaw.

"Yes, Thornstar?" she asked.

"Do you believe Lifepaw is ready to become an apprentice?" Thornstar asked.

Tinypelt smiled, directing her gaze at Lifepaw. She nodded, then turned back to Thornstar. "I wouldn't have it any other way, Thornstar. She is ready to serve her clan."

"Lifepaw," Thornstar spoke, turning to her. His eyes stared at her, one of them a pale green and focused, the other dull. He had been blinded in one eye at a young age, though it had never

stopped him from becoming leader.

"Yes, Thornstar?" Lifepaw gulped, suddenly realizing how nervous she was. Her chest felt as if it were about to explode, and she gripped her claws onto the rock, waiting for him to speak.

"Do you promise to uphold the warrior code, even if it means risking your life?" he asked.

"I do," Lifepaw agreed.

"Then by the power of StarClan, I give you your warrior name of Lifesnow."

Lifesnow, she thought. It was so simple, yet so beautiful.

"LIFESNOW! LIFESNOW!" the clan cried, shouting in joy.

Lifesnow turned to face the crowd, grinning at them. She waved her tail as they shouted, watching her friends cheer the loudest of them all.

"LIFESNOW!" she heard once more. The crowd soon died down, and Thornstar gently wrapped his tail around Lifesnow.

"Remember, vigil tonight. Keep in mind what I said earlier," he spoke quietly, walking past her.

Lifesnow shuddered, but nodded, running down the rock to greet those below. Immediately, Mousestripe ran up to her, grinning widely.

"Congratulations, Lifesnow!" she exclaimed. "I feel so old now."

Lifesnow rolled her eyes. "You're not even a senior warrior in my eyes, Mousestripe."

"Oh, you flatterer," Mousestripe teased. "It's a whole different experience becoming a warrior. I remember becoming one myself. Oh, there's patrols, hunting, even mentoring! Maybe you'll get an apprentice of your own someday."

"Maybe," Lifesnow purred.

"Seeing you up there reminded me of the day Shinypelt became a warrior with her brothers. She attended your ceremony, no doubt," Mousestripe purred.

Lifesnow was usually sick of hearing these things about her mother, but she actually appreciated Mousestripe's kind words.

"Thank you, Mousestripe," Lifesnow said. "And thanks for watching out for me when I was younger too."

"No problem," Mousestripe assured her. She went off with Thornstar, and before Lifesnow could turn around, she felt a tail slap her on the back.

"Hey, great job!" Graytail shouted. She turned around, smiling at him and Stormnight. The two were both mates and fathers now, even if the kits Graytail cared for weren't his own. Minnowfin, Graytail's mate, had been pregnant with her old mate's kits when she became mates with Graytail. Still, Lifesnow was glad to see them doing well. They certainly weren't the same young toms she remembered as kits.

"You better work hard," Stormnight advised her. "Maybe you'll be leader someday.'

Lifesnow rolled her eyes. "As if. Did you see the ceremony?"

"Of course," Graytail spoke.

"Minnowfin's kits doing well?" Lifesnow asked Graytail.

He nodded. "They're getting cuter every day. I wish I were their father, but I'm glad to be helping to raise them."

"Your kits doing well as apprentices?" Lifesnow asked Stormnight.

He nodded, grinning slightly.

"We better be off," Stormnight decided. "Good luck with

vigil, Lifesnow. It'll be boring doing it alone."

Graytail nodded. "Yes, it is better with siblings or other cats, but you'll do fine."

Lifesnow smiled, waving good-bye to them.

"LIFESNOW!" came a shout. Lifesnow tumbled over as Marshpaw leapt on top of her. In a flash of white, she was thrown on the ground, dust swirling around her.

"Gosh, Marshpaw, aren't you excited?" Lifesnow asked.

"Your ceremony made me realize how excited I am for mine!" Marshpaw exclaimed.

"Mind getting off me?" Lifesnow asked. Marshpaw was bigger and heavier than her, crushing her tiny weight.

"Oh," Marshpaw spoke, glancing down. "Sorry," he said, standing up and brushing his tail against her pelt to wipe off dust.

"Good job, Lifesnow," Ripplepaw purred.

"Thanks, Ripplepaw," Lifesnow replied. "Will you be a full medicine cat soon?"

"Spiritheart says in a few moons," Ripplepaw replied. "I can't wait!"

"Medicine cat, blech," Marshpaw gagged. "Warrior life is the best."

"Some things never change," Lifesnow laughed.

Both Ripplepaw and Marshpaw waved good-bye, leaving her with Goosepaw. She turned to him, rushing to him. He nuzzled her gently, smiling.

"Congratulations," he said.

"Thanks," Lifesnow replied, hoping he could not see her

blushing. "You'll be a warrior soon."

"I know, but it'll be a *long* moon!" Goosepaw sighed in exasperation.

"Patience is never easy," she replied, grinning.

"Hey, I see your dad," Goosepaw whispered. "I'll catch up with you later."

Lifesnow nodded, turning to see Patchfur approaching towards her. He had a weak smile on his face, and he padded towards her slowly, his green eyes lighting up as he saw her.

"Lifesnow," he spoke quietly.

"Hi, Patchfur," she responded, embracing her father.

"Congratulations," he told her. "You really have grown quite well and made an excellent warrior."

"Well, Tinypelt helped me get there. Why didn't you tell me she was your sister?" Lifesnow asked.

"My past is not so much of importance," Patchfur replied quickly. "But I'm proud of you. It makes me glad to see you've grown and matured so well. You're becoming more like your mother every day."

These were the comments that made her gag. Patchfur wouldn't stop commenting on how similar she and Shinypelt were.

"It saddens me to think it's been a full four seasons since Shinypelt's departure, but I'm glad to have you," Patchfur purred.

"Thanks, Patchfur," Lifesnow replied. It felt awkward around her father, not so much loving anymore. He had grown distant from her as she grew older.

She was tempted to talk to him about Thornstar's prophecy, but no words came out. Instead, she cleared her throat and gazed into his eyes. "So, um, you were going to talk to me earlier?"

"Oh," Patchfur spoke, gazing down. "That's not important, really. Good luck on vigil."

"Thanks. Love you," Lifesnow called as he padded away.

"Love you," he replied very faintly as he faded from her view. What had happened to him?

Chapter 45

Salmon rested in the den, her feet tucked beneath her, feeling the warmth of her nest. Her eyes were shut, and her breaths were short and slow. After a long day of hunting for the tribe, she needed a good rest.

Her eyelids were shut softly, and her paws twitched as a dream came into focus.

"Shinypaw...Shinypaw..." came a distant voice.

Her eyes opened, and she stood in a forest much different from the one around her. For starters, everything smelled different, yet somewhat familiar. For a moment, she had forgotten what her current home smelled like. This forest was fresh and cold, and she liked it.

For whatever reason, Salmon moved towards the voice, watching as a young white and gray tom came into view, his green eyes shining brightly. She did not know this tom, but she had seen him before, or so she thought. Immediately, the name came off her tongue.

"Patchpaw," she purred. She was taken aback how easy it was for the words to roll off her tongue. She did not know this tom, yet his name came easily.

The young tom ran towards her, and Salmon did not know why, but she felt her chest flutter. She realized she loved this tom, whoever he was. He was Patchpaw, the tom she loved and wanted to be with.

"Walk in the moonlight?" he asked.

Salmon looked up, now noticing that it was indeed night. She nodded, following Patchpaw into the forest. For a second, she

remembered she did not know this tom or this forest, but these thoughts were immediately replaced by those only of the tom.

Why, she remembered last time he'd taken her into the woods. He'd caught a rabbit, and they'd brought it back for the clan. When they found every cat asleep, they gobbled it up and curled up next to each other in the apprentice den.

Apprentice den? Salmon came to her senses again. They had no apprentice den.

Still, she followed the tom through the woods, padding beside him happily.

"Look, the moon is almost full," Patchpaw pointed out.

Salmon glanced up, noticing the moon was nearly its round shape.

"Almost time for a gathering," she agreed, the words flowing out of her mouth without any knowledge being put into them. How could she say these things so easily?

"Do you think Cloudstar will let us go?" he wondered.

"I hope so," she purred, rubbing against him. It was wrong. She did not know this tom, but his touch was familiar, and she smiled as he wrapped his tail around her and purred.

"Tag!" Patchpaw called, poking her with his tail.

Salmon laughed, racing after Patchpaw happily. "You're not getting away that fast!" she shouted, rushing after him.

"Oh, yeah?" he asked. "Come on, Shinypaw!"

I'm Salmon, she thought, but then she realized she was Shinypaw, and she raced after him happily, tagging him with her golden tail.

For awhile they ran around, collapsing in the meadow, exhausted. The stars twinkled, and Salmon speculated that StarClan

was watching them.

Wait, StarClan?

"Pretty night," Patchpaw admitted.

Salmon nodded beside him. She had never been so happy to be with this tom. He was charming, clever, funny...She could not imagine life without him.

Salmon leaned her head against him, and Patchpaw smiled, his tongue rasping across her cheek.

Salmon grinned, looking into his bright green eyes.

"I love you, Patchpaw," she purred.

Everything began to fade before she could hear his response. As the room darkened, Salmon burst awake in her den, her heart beating rapidly against her chest.

It had happened again.

Ever since she'd been declared future heir, she'd been having odd dreams that she could not explain. She had thought they were just dreams at first. Her first had been of her as a kit playing with the same white and gray tom. She assumed the dreams would go away, but they had not.

Each night, she'd have a dream of this tom...Patchpaw, sometimes Patchfur, sometimes Patchkit. His name was strange, but it remained in her brain. Her heart fluttered each time she heard it. For whatever reason, she always knew him and loved him in her dreams. He was her mate, no doubt about it, but she had no explanation for all of this.

Salmon repeated to herself they had just been dreams, but these were vivid dreams, almost like memories. And for whatever reason, she was not Salmon, but another she-cat...Shinypaw or Shinypelt. Another strange name...

She had assumed she'd be able to keep her senses, but for

some reason, these dreams always caused her to drift from reality. It was as if she were with other cats, in a clan maybe. And though she always wanted to tell Patchfur that she was not this Shinypelt, words would automatically fly off her tongue without her pausing to think.

Salmon knew she needed to talk to Berry, her father even. These dreams were getting out of hand, and she became more frightened as they continued. They weren't natural at all.

Creeping past sleeping cats, Salmon stepped outside and came to the Berry's den, peeking her head inside. Berry rested against the wall in a nest, sleeping soundly.

Maybe I should wait until morning to bother her, Salmon thought. She went to turn, but Berry suddenly spoke.

"Hello? Does someone need my help?" she asked.

Salmon turned away, hoping Berry didn't notice her, but it was too late. Berry stepped outside, taken aback by Salmon's presense.

"Salmon, do you need something?" Berry asked.

"Um...no," Salmon replied.

"Are you sure?" Berry asked.

"Just stretching my legs and feeling the air. It's pretty stuffy in the den," Salmon explained.

"Oh, well, all right. Good night," Berry called, descending back into the den. Salmon sighed in relief, heading back to her nest as well. She prayed she would not have another dream.

The night was restless, but Salmon awoke in the morning, exhausted. The sleep she had was dark, without any dreams at all. She stood up, realizing she needed to take this to her father. If anyone could help, it was him. After all, she had not even told him the prophecy, and just keeping that from him made her feel extremely guilty.

As cats moved about, Salmon exited the den and headed towards her father's, a bright sun shining up ahead. Brightly colored leaves fell from trees, autumn now completely in session. As the cherry blossom tree shed its leaves, one last pink blossom remained, tucked away at the bottom of the tree. Salmon had brought it from the ground and placed it near her nest, waiting for the flower to die, but it still had not. It was the little piece of her mother left.

Salmon sighed, realizing it had been nearly a year now since her mother's death. And even though she had felt her mother in the blossoms, she still felt like Cherry Blossom was gone forever.

Salmon glanced up, noticing Oak chatting away with Storm. As their conversation died down and Salmon walked towards him, Storm shot her a normal glare and padded away into the woods with his sisters for a hunt, she presumed.

"Ah, Salmon! How are you?" Oak asked, a bit peppier than usual. She wondered what had him in a good mood.

"Fine," Salmon lied. "Can I talk to you?"

"Sure," Oak agreed.

"In your den?" Salmon asked, pointing her tail to his resting spot.

Oak's eyes widened. "Oh, yes. Sorry," he murmured. She followed her father inside, sitting down across from him.

"What do you need?" he asked. She noticed how his eyes whizzed from corner to corner, as if he were nervous. What was he nervous about?

Salmon realized there was no time to worry for her father. There were bigger issues at hand.

"I've been having dreams," she began.

"Dreams?" Oak asked, raising an eyebrow.

"They're strange, really. But for some reason, I keep

dreaming about this young tom who is my mate, I think, and I've been meaning to say this, but--"

"Mate?" Oak cut her off. "You know, that's precisely what I wanted to tell you."

"Actually, Oak, I was still trying to tell you--"

"As you know," Oak began, and Salmon sighed, realizing this conversation would have to wait. "You are heir to be leader."

"Yes, I am aware," Salmon agreed.

"And well," Oak sighed.

"What is it?" Salmon asked.

"Never in any time period have we ruled with a single ruler who is, in fact, a female," Oak explained.

"What are you saying?" Salmon asked.

"I'm saying that, not to be rude, but it won't be fitting for you to run this tribe alone when I have gone," Oak explained.

"What do you mean?" Salmon asked. "I'm heir! Of course I can run it alone!"

"Yes, but, as heir you are required to continue this royal race, and if you have no mate...What I'm trying to say is, you need a mate, Salmon. We need a king."

"I'm heir!" Salmon hissed. "We don't need anyone!"

Oak sighed. "Please try to understand. A tribe ruled by two is greater than one. I have no doubts you'll do well, but you also need a strong mate by your side who will ultimately share your duties and help you."

"Mmhm?" Salmon asked.

"You have not seemed to taken any liking to toms around

her, so I have already decided to assign a mate to you," Oak explained.

Salmon gasped. "That's so unfair!"

"Please, this tom is fabulous. He'll do well," Oak assured her. And it was then that Salmon realized why Oak had been peppy whilst talking to Storm.

"I've assigned Storm as your mate."

"You've got to be kidding," was all Salmon could say. "That jerk hates my guts! I'd never love him in a million years!"

"Now, Salmon, don't get upset," Oak explained. "The deal's been done. You are mates now, and he will rule alongside you."

"Couldn't you have chosen a nicer tom? Why couldn't I have chosen?!" Salmon complained, tears stinging her eyes.

"The other toms are either too young or not qualified enough. Storm is a perfect match. I don't see why this is a big deal. You'll make a perfect pair," Oak purred.

"I-I won't do it! I won't!"

"You must. It is official now," Oak said more sternly.

"Does this happen with every heir?" Salmon asked.

Oak nodded slowly.

"You mean..." Salmon took a deep breath. "Cherry Blossom was *assigned* to you?"

"Yes," Oak explained, "But I truly did love her."

"I can't believe this! You never loved her! She was just your assigned mate!" Salmon snapped. She made her way to the den, scowling.

"Salmon, you have to understand," he began.

"Just leave me alone!" she shouted, rushing out of the den. Immediately, she bumped into Storm, noticing a twinkle in his eye as he saw her.

"Hey there, mate!" he called.

Salmon backed up, horrified. What was going on?!

Chapter 46

Lemonfur laid curled up beside Thymewhisker, her head resting gently next to his. His pelt was brushed against hers, bringing her warmth in the coldness of leaf-fall. Her breaths were slow and deep, and she felt herself falling into an even deeper sleep.

When Lemonfur opened her eyes, she was padding through a forest, one that was different than NightClan's, but somewhat familiar. Despite the forest being unknown to her, she recognized every tree, every rock, and every scent. But how?

"This way," called a cat. Lemonfur looked up, realizing she was padding alongside other cats, those who were also unknown to her. Even though their scents seemed unfamiliar at first, she soon recognized them well and continued on.

"Keep an eye out for any trespassing cats," a white tom, who Lemonfur immediately knew as Cloudstar for some reason, called.

"Let's hope for some prey to come out," a tiny gray she-cat...Tinypelt, whined.

Words slipped out of Lemonfur's mouth quickly. "The snow has almost melted. It won't be long now before prey begins to show itself again."

"Shinypelt," shouted a cat up ahead.

She immediately lifted her head, padding past Tinypelt and towards the cat. The cat she ran to was silver-blue, with a patch of fur missing down his thigh.

"Stormnight, hi," she responded, knowing this tom as her brother. But Lemonfur had no siblings.

"Colder day," he admitted, shivering a little. Lemonfur glanced down at his bare leg, pitying him.

"It's not that bad," she explained. "How are you holding up?" she asked, gently placing her tail on his shoulder.

"What do you mean?" Stormnight asked.

What did Lemonfur mean? Words came out of her mouth before she could ponder. "With the outlashes," she whispered.

"I haven't had one since I was an apprentice. You know that, Shinypelt," Stormnight replied.

"I was just making sure," she responded.

"Besides, you've never had to deal with them," he growled.

Lemonfur could tell this comment had made him angry, so she shut her mouth and continued padding beside him.

"And how is Cheetahwing?" she asked. Immediately, the image of a spotted she-cat floated in her mind.

"Good. Maybe one day we'll be mates," he purred.

Lemonfur smiled warmly.

"Hey, we're on a patrol here!" shouted a tom. "No chatting it up!"

"Sorry," they both murmured.

Suddenly, the images were washed away from Lemonfur's mind, and she woke up, the forest and cats fading behind her.

Startled, she sat up in the dark NightClan den, glancing around. Her heart was racing, and she shivered. This was not the first time she had a dream like this.

They're only dreams, she told herself, but Silverstar's message kept running through her mind. Was this somehow related to the prophecy, these odd dreams that had no explanations? The dreams were so vivid, so life-like, it made Lemonfur wonder if perhaps these dreams had once happened.

And these cats? Who were they? Perhaps they were from a clan nearby, but she had not gotten the clan name. Each time she tried to determine the scent, it would just smell familiar and like home.

It was odd that Lemonfur was called Shinypelt instead of Lemonfur. The name was familiar, but Lemonfur had forgotten where she'd heard that name before. She was too frightened to ask around, afraid perhaps it had been a bad cat, one that NightClan did not speak of.

Lemonfur felt Thymewhisker stir beside her, and she turned, watching his eyelids lazily open.

"Lemonfur, is everything okay?" he whispered.

"I'm fine," she assured him. "Go back to sleep."

Thymewhisker looked at her a moment more, then shut his eyes as Lemonfur licked his cheek. She felt him fall back asleep beside her, and she frowned.

She wanted to tell Thymewhisker everything, but she didn't know how. She had been told not to tell him of the prophecy, but what about the dreams? She hated keeping these things from her mate, the tom who she should tell everything to, but she was so confused, she wasn't sure what to do anymore.

She was pleased, however, to see Thymewhisker had gained full control of his voice again. When his family had found out, they were pleased and excited. Raspberryblaze was in tears, apologizing again and again for the dare she had proposed when they were only kits.

These thoughts warmed Lemonfur, and for a moment, her mind drifted away from the problem at hand. But no, this was serious.

Lemonfur had wanted to tell Ambershine, but she didn't know how. For several sunrises now these dreams kept reappearing randomly, and Lemonfur knew that sooner or later, she'd have to

tell some cat. But for now, she decided to keep it quiet.

Yawning, she closed her eyes, falling back asleep.

In the morning, it was a warmer day, a bright sun shining up above. Thymewhisker purred against her, his tongue waking her up. She turned, smiling at him, and padded outside with him, the NightClan camp full of chatter.

"Want to share a squirrel?" he asked, pointing to the fresh-kill pile.

"Sure," she agreed. "I'll wait here."

Lemonfur settled down on the warm ground, watching cats pad by.

"LEMONFUR! LEMONFUR!" shouted Pearpaw, running towards Lemonfur.

"Hey, how are you?" she asked, watching some of Pearpaw's siblings follow close behind. They'd been doing well in their training, and Lemonfur knew in a few moons, they'd be warriors beside her.

"Good! Except I had to pick ticks off Poppyfur all morning," Pearpaw complained.

"Ah, I don't miss that," Lemonfur laughed.

"See you, Lemonfur!" Pearpaw called, waving her tail and leaving Lemonfur behind.

Thymewhisker approached, a plump squirrel in his jaws.

"I got the very best one," he purred, sitting down across from Lemonfur. "It took some time going through that pile, but I managed to find a plump one."

"Thank you, Thymewhisker," Lemonfur replied, taking a bite of the squirrel. Flavor filled her mouth, and she grinned, not realizing how hungry she had been.

"Ashclaw assign you to any patrols?" Thymewhisker asked.

Lemonfur shrugged. "I guess we'll wait and see."

Lemonfur felt a tail wrap around her, and she turned, noticing Raspberryblaze.

"Sorry to break up the couple's breakfast," she began, grinning.

"Raspberryblaze," Thymewhisker growled.

"Relax, brother. She doesn't mind," the ginger she-cat responded, sitting down next to Lemonfur.

"So, how's it going?" she asked.

"With what?" Lemonfur wondered.

"Your relationship!" Raspberryblaze exclaimed, glancing at Thymewhisker and Lemonfur. "Spill all the details!"

Lemonfur watched as Thymewhisker blushed, looking outraged at Raspberryblaze.

"Lay off, will you?" he asked.

"Any kits soon?" Raspberryblaze wondered.

Now Lemonfur felt herself blushing. "No, and that's not really any of your business," she replied.

Raspberryblaze laughed. "I'm just kidding. Well, nice chatting. Ashclaw just assigned me on patrol. He wanted me to get you too, Thymewhisker."

"All right. Let me finish up my breakfast," he spoke.

Raspberryblaze nodded and padded away. Thymewhisker shook his head in dissappointment.

"She's got to find a mate," he complained.

Lemonfur laughed. She swallowed her squirrel, a silence forming between them. Lemonfur paused for a moment, then spoke.

"Thymewhisker, there was something I wanted to tell you," she began.

"THYMEWHISKER, HURRY UP!" Raspberryblaze shouted. "THE PATROL'S LEAVING!"

"I'll catch up with you later," Thymewhisker promised. "See you!"

Lemonfur nodded, biting her cheek as he padded away. She had wanted to tell him about the dreams, but she had missed her chance. She sighed, more confused than ever.

Chapter 47

"Come here, Sunrise," the boy called, nestled in his bed. The sky had already turned dark, and Sunrise was tired from a long day. She sprang onto his bed, curling up next to his legs that were tucked beneath the blue covers.

"That's a good girl," he said, stroking her between the ears. Sunrise purred and rolled onto her back, purring loudly as he gently rubbed her stomach.

When his hands left her, he reached for the light and turned it off. Sunrise curled up beside him and shut her eyes too, listening to the sound of the autumn wind until it eventually lulled her to sleep.

At first, her sleep was nothing more than darkness...peaceful and calm. And then, a forest came into view with tall trees stretching from the ground. She'd had dreams like this before, when she dreamt of being a clan cat. Sometimes, she'd still have them, even though her dreams felt like they'd never come true.

But this was different. She found herself in a den, and she knew every corner of it. To the left was where Stormpaw and Graypaw slept. Over in the corner was Tinypaw's resting spot. Cats flooded her mind. How she knew all this, she wasn't sure.

"Shinypaw, wake up!" she heard.

Sunrise padded outside the den easily, a calico she-cat waiting patiently near the den entrance.

"Sorry, Tawnyheart," Sunrise spoke as if it had been on cue.

Tawnyheart only smiled slightly. "We all sleep in some days. Why, once Spottedmask had to shake me so hard..." She paused, and Sunrise understood this she-cat's past instantly.

Memories flooded through Sunrise's mind of Tawnyheart's secret being spilled: she was a medicine cat apprentice who had given birth to Thornfrost's kits in secret. And Cloudstar had been kind enough not to exile her but allow her to become a warrior. What a surprise that she, a former medicine cat with barely any warrior training, was mentoring her.

Wait, I'm Sunrise. I'm a kittypet. I don't have a mentor. Her

thoughts suddenly caught up to her, but her legs followed Tawnyheart into the familiar forest, noting where the meadow was, the rushing river, and best hunting spots.

"Today we'll practice battle training," Tawnyheart explained, leading her further into the woods. Already, Sunrise was aware they were heading to the clearing. How did she know all of this? It was odd...

"No hunting?" Sunrise wondered.

"Not today," Tawnyheart replied, shaking her head. "I want to be sure you know how to protect yourself."

"From what? What threats could there be?" she asked.

Tawnyheart only bit her lip. "Just for protection."

Sunrise knew Tawnyheart was keeping something from her.

"We'll practice side-sweeping today," Tawnyheart explained, stopping in the middle of a clearing. It was a warm day, and the sun's rays warmed Sunrise's pelt.

"Simply rush towards the cat on one side and swipe at their paws. If you do it fast enough, they'll be confused and end up face-first in a pile of dirt," Tawnyheart explained, her whiskers twitching in amusement.

Sunrise nodded, instantly running towards Tawnyheart. Unfortunately, she did not notice the stick on the ground, and she slipped, landing next to Tawnyheart's hind leg.

"Oops," Sunrise spoke, laughing.

Tawnyheart laughed too, helping Sunrise up. "We'll practice some more," she purred.

Suddenly, everything began to fade from Sunrise's view, the forest, Tawnyheart, this world disappearing from her instantly. Her eyes opened to find sunlight shining through the window, the rays appearing on Sunrise's pelt.

Sunrise shuddered, trying to shake the dream away, but it had been real. It had not been the first dream she'd had. She'd been having nightly dreams where she was training to become a warrior, going on patrols, doing warrior stuff, she supposed. But she had not known how these cats had all appeared, why they kept appearing. She hadn't even known this much about warrior training. How could these thoughts have all come together?

Maybe it was just what Sunrise thought warrior training was. But these dreams were so continuous and life-like, they felt almost like memories. And who was Shinypaw? Why was she

always Sunrise?

Thoughts racing through her mind, Sunrise leapt down the bed, finding that the door had been left open for her convenience. She padded outside the bedroom, her long claws making noise on the hardwood floor.

How come Holly and Polly's claws were short and round?

Sunrise's claws had never been cut, but they sure were long than other kittypets. She noticed it especially around Fawn and Anna. Their claws were tiny, rounded. Perhaps it was just some recessive gene.

Sunrise found cat nibble already laid out for her, and she munched away, hoping the food would calm her thoughts. It did not.

It wasn't that Sunrise disliked these odd dreams. In fact, she thoroughly enjoyed them. In her dreams, she was a warrior at long last, learning about the warrior code, hunting, fighting! Being a warrior seemed like fun.

But it's not real. That's not what warrior training is like, she reminded herself.

Sunrise left the rest of her food and padded outside through the cat door, a cool breeze running through the air. Leaves fell off the trees at a constant pace now, and Sunrise could tell that in a few months, snow would coat the ground.

Sunrise sat down on the grass, licking her pelt clean. She could still feel soreness where she'd landed on the ground after failing to sidesweep Tawnyheart. But how? It was all fake anyway.

"Sunrise!" came a shout.

Sunrise tensed up, not wanting to turn around. It was obviously Fawn, but Sunrise was not in the mood to speak.

"Sunrise, are you deaf?!" Fawn called again.

Sunrise spun aound nervously, giving a weak smile. "Good morning!"

Fawn leapt down from the fence, approaching Sunrise curiously. She eyed Sunrise, then paused. "You okay?"

"Fine," Sunrise lied, trying to throw her thoughts away quickly. But Fawn could pick up stuff Sunrise could not, and she only frowned.

"You've been acting strange awhile now. I can tell something's been bothering you. Has it been the prophecy?" Fawn asked.

Sunrise had kept these dreams from Fawn, Anna, and even Frog, for fear they'd look at her strangely. She'd wanted to tell them, but she had just felt so odd mentioning it.

"Nothing," Sunrise replied.

"Sunrise," Fawn spoke sternly. "I'm your best friend. You can tell me anything. If it's the prophecy, let me tell you that it'll all turn out fine."

"It's not that," she sighed.

"What is it?" Fawn asked.

"Have you ever had strange dreams?" Sunrise asked.

Fawn looked at her as if Sunrise had just asked if Fawn's coat was brown.

"Oh, right," Sunrise spoke, laughing uneasily.

"What dreams have you been having?" Fawn asked. "StarClan dreams?"

"Um...maybe," Sunrise replied.

"Really?! What are they?!" Fawn exclaimed, suddenly intrigued.

"Well, I don't know. It's like I'm an apprentice in some warrior clan, training with this she-cat—her name is Tawnyheart. She's a medicine cat, or she was."

Fawn looked lost. "What?"

"I've been dreaming that I'm an apprentice named Shinypaw. I have brothers, a mother, an adoptive father. I've been training to become a warrior in this clan...I still don't know the name," she explained.

"That's not been any StarClan dream I've received. Maybe it's just your imagination."

"That's what I thought, but they're continuous. I thought maybe it was just me thinking of training to be a warrior, but I've been learning the code. It all seems so real. The same cats keep appearing. It just seems like a cat's memory almost," Sunrise explained.

"We're seeing Anna now. She'll have the answers," Fawn decided.

"But what about you? Has StarClan told you I'd get weird dreams?" Sunrise asked.

Fawn shook her head. "StarClan has been silent for awhile. Maybe they have been sending dreams to you. Then again, those are unlike dreams I've had before."

Sunrise reluctantly followed Fawn towards Anna's house, her stomach twisting and clenching in every direction. Maybe telling Fawn about the dreams had not been a good idea after all.

"Anna!" Fawn called from the top of Anna's fence. The she-cat was bathing in sunlight. She glanced up at them and smiled, motioning them with her tail to come down.

Fawn immediately marched up to Anna, Sunrise following behind slowly.

"How are you?" Anna asked.

"We have something serious to talk about," Fawn explained.

"Hmm..." Anna sat up, eyes fixed on Fawn. She peeked around her, noticing Sunrise. "Ah, Sunrise, you're here too!"

"I can go," Sunrise offered.

"No!" Fawn growled. "Come here."

Sunrise came to Fawn with her tail drooping. She sat down next to her, and Anna eyed them curiously.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Sunrise has been having dreams."

"What sort of dreams?" Anna asked.

"That's what I'm trying to figure out," Sunrise explained. Fawn eyed her, and Sunrise began dwelling on everything, even more so than she told Fawn. Anna just kept nodding, patiently waiting for Sunrise to finish.

"Is it StarClan?" Fawn asked as soon as Sunrise finished.

"I cannot be sure," Anna sighed. "From what Frog has told me, this seems like the correct method of teaching for warriors, which is strange, considering you've never heard these things before. But like I said, this must relate to the prophecy. Maybe this has something to do with the cats who look like you. Perhaps you are all sharing these memories, or perhaps they are memories of that cat. Either way, keep a lookout. I'll talk to Frog, see if he has any ideas. We're getting closer...I can feel it. Fawn, keep me notified with any StarClan dreams."

Fawn nodded, but Sunrise felt sick to her stomach. What was going on?

Chapter 48

Lifesnow, sleeping soundly, found herself in the nursery of SnowClan, a familiar place that she had once grown in. But in this nursery slept older cats, some she had never met before. The atmosphere smelled different, like a rainy leaf-fall.

Lifesnow herself felt different in this strange place. She felt tinier, looking up to nearly every cat. It reminded her of being a kit in the nursery.

"Settle down now," she heard Mousestripe murmur from the corner of the den. Lifesnow looked up, surprised to see a younger Mousestripe standing in front of Stormnight and Graytail, though this Stormnight and Graytail were young kits, still displaying their scars though. She wondered how they'd gotten them at such a young age.

"Mommy," Lifesnow mewed, the words sliding out of her mouth without any thought. "What did Stormkit and Graykit do?"

"Go back to playing, Shinykit," Mousestripe purred. "I'm just having a chat with your brothers."

"But what did they do?" she asked.

Mousestripe bit her lip nervously. "They weren't...playing fairly," she explained.

"That's not true," Stormkit muttered.

"Hush!" Mousestripe snapped.

"Can they play now?" Lifesnow asked.

"I'm afraid they'll be in timeout for a little while," Mousestripe explained. "Go run and play with Patchkit, Shinykit. Your brothers will join your shortly."

Lifesnow, or rather, Shinykit, frowned at her brothers, their green eyes gleaming with sadness. Lifesnow felt her thoughts slipping, Shinykit's thoughts replacing hers. In Shinykit's mind, she wondered why only she had gotten her mother's gleaming blue eyes. Had her deceased father had green eyes as well?

Lifesnow took one last look at her brothers and ran off towards a white and gray tom in the distance, the nursery slowly fading from view.

Lifesnow burst upright, finding that the warriors den was nearly empty with a new day. She breathed heavily, trying to shake off the dream. It had not been her first.

She did not know why she kept dreaming of her mother. Lifesnow never longed for Shinypelt anymore. She'd thought the dreams were only because Lifesnow missed her mother, but Lifesnow definitely could not miss a she-cat she'd never met, and the dreams were persistent. But the thing that frightened her was that the dreams felt so real, like Shinypelt's actual memories.

The only dreams she'd had were of Shinypelt's kithood, but she was beginning to get nervous. Was this what Thornstar meant with the prophecy? Was she receiving dreams because of the cursed prophecy?

Thornstar's words rang through her head: *Maybe it's time you speak to your father.*

And what would her father even help her with? He wouldn't know why she was having these dreams. He barely spoke to her! How could chatting with him help Lifesnow in any way?

Lifesnow shook these thoughts away, suddenly aware of what day it was. How could she forget?! Marshpaw had tackled her the day before in excitement. Today was Goosepaw and Marshpaw's warrior ceremony!

Lifesnow burst out of the den, already finding cats rushing around camp. Thornstar already stood near the top of the rock, ready to begin the ceremony. Lifesnow turned, noticing Ripplepaw

watching from the medicine cat den. Unfortunately, she wouldn't become a full medicine cat for another few moons, but she seemed happy to watch her brothers receive their warrior names.

"Lifesnow!" Goosepaw called from up ahead.

Lifesnow spun around, running towards the tom excitedly.

"Good luck today," she told him.

Goosepaw purred. "Thanks. I'll see you after the ceremony, okay?"

Lifesnow nodded, catching Patchfur go by in the side of her vision. Her stomach clenched, and she was thinking of talking to him. No, Goosepaw and Marshpaw's ceremony was more important. Chatting with Patchfur would have to wait.

"ALL CATS OLD ENOUGH TO CATCH THEIR OWN PREY JOIN BENEATH THE ROCK FOR A CLAN MEETING!" Thornstar yowled.

Lifesnow excitedly made her way towards the rock, pushing past cats until she came to the very front row. Goosepaw and Marshpaw happily trotted up the rock, their gaze focused on their clanmates below.

As Thornstar began the normal announcement, asking mentors if they were ready, Lifesnow directed her hearing away from him, instead focused on Patchfur, who sat towards the edge of the crowd, looking down. She didn't want to chat with him, but the thought of finding out answers set her on edge. She directed her gaze back to Thornstar, trying to ignore the calling to talk with him.

"Marshpaw, from this day forward, until you receive your warrior name, you shall be known as Marshshadow!"

Cats cheered, and Marshshadow stood proudly, puffing out his white chest. Lifesnow could hear Blueocean cheering loudly behind her, Pinethorn smiling proudly next to her. Lifesnow wondered if Blueocean's former mate, Gooseleaf, the true father of the kits, was even invited to the ceremony. Probably not...

"And Goosepaw, from this day forward, until you receive your warrior name, you shall be known as Goosefur!"

"MARSHSHADOW! GOOSEFUR! MARSHSHADOW! GOOSEFUR!" the clan cried, Lifesnow shouting with them. Her heart beat rapidly as she thought of finally being warriors with the two toms. She'd waited so long for this day, and she was sure they had too.

The cheering died down, and cats began to disperse. Lifesnow waited patiently as both Blueocean and Pinethorn chatted eagerly with the toms until leaving them be. Lifesnow purred and rushed over to the toms, Ripplepaw joining her.

"Congratulations!" Ripplepaw exclaimed.

"Aw, shucks," Marshshadow purred. "Guess who's got a mate?"

"What? Who?!" Lifesnow gasped.

"Summerleaf," Marshshadow replied. "I've had a crush on her forever, and she actually said yes!"

Lifesnow smiled, happy for Marshshadow. Summerleaf was one of Tasha's kits, half-MoonClan, half kittypet, but she supposed it no longer mattered anymore. Marshshadow himself was not full SnowClan, and now, he had a loving mate who loved him for who he was, not what his past was.

"Speaking of mates..." Goosefur began. He looked at Lifesnow, his eyes gleaming. "Lifesnow, will you be my mate?"

Lifesnow's eyes widened. She had not expected Goosefur to ask this so quickly. Well, she guessed she had. After all, they were in love, and she'd always assumed...

"Yes!" she exclaimed, nuzzling the tom. Ripplepaw purred beside Lifesnow while Marshshadow pretended to vomit on the ground.

"Now I've got *this* to look forward to in the warriors den?"

he groaned.

"Relax, you'll have Summerleaf," Goosefur snapped.

The three began to chat, and Lifesnow noticed Patchfur sitting near the rock, licking his fur.

"I'll be back later. I've got to talk to Patchfur," Lifesnow explained.

The three waved good-bye, quickly beginning to chat again. It was only Goosefur who eyed Lifesnow curiously as she padded away, walking towards her father. Her heart beat rapidly as she thought of what she was going to say.

Patchfur glanced up, his green eyes locking with hers.

"H-Hi," Lifesnow stammered.

"Congratulations on being mates with Goosefur," Patchfur purred.

"Oh, you heard?" she asked.

"You were speaking a bit loudly," he replied, chuckling slightly.

"Mind if I sit?" Lifesnow asked.

Patchfur shook his head, and Lifesnow sat beside her father, finding the environment to be a tad awkward. They sat in silence for a few moments, and then Lifesnow cleared her throat.

"There's this prophecy Thornstar told me about," she began.

She watched Patchfur's eyes widen. "I-I know. He told me too."

"Wait, what?" Lifesnow asked, surprised. "You know the prophecy as well."

"As your father, I think it's best I know. You didn't tell me

anyway," Patchfur replied solemnly.

"Oh, well, Thornstar told me to talk to you, and I've been putting it off, and well," she paused, watching Patchfur eye her with curiousity. "I've been having these dreams..."

"Dreams?" Patchfur asked.

"About Shinypelt...as a kit," Lifesnow replied.

Patchfur stood there, frozen.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"D-Dreams, you say?" he stuttered.

"Patchfur?" she asked.

"Are they sort of lifelike?" he asked.

"Yes, but..." Lifesnow paused, glancing up at him. "How did you know?"

Patchfur sighed, standing up and beginning to pace around Lifesnow. "I knew this day would come, and now I'll have to tell you everything. Oh, but I didn't think you were ready!"

"Patchfur, what's going on?" she asked, frightened by her father.

Patchfur sighed. "There's something I...we...the whole clan have been keeping from you about Shinypelt."

"What do you mean?" Lifesnow asked, her heart pounding.

"As you know, Shinypelt died in the battle of MoonClan. I remember when you were a kit, you asked me why she was so special, why every cat spoke of her when others warriors had died. The truth was...we were losing that day."

"What?" Lifesnow wondered.

"MoonClan had a huge army, and cats were dying left and

right. I don't know if Mousestripe or Thornstar or some other cat told you this, but there was a prophecy that went along with Shinypelt."

"So I've heard," Lifesnow said, nodding.

"When Mousestripe was pregnant, Moonstar, the deceased leader of MoonClan and current occupater of the Dark Forest, cursed Mousestripe."

"Cursed her how?" Lifesnow asked.

"You've surely noticed Graytail and Stormnight's scars. You're aware that some cats act strange around them," Patchfur reminded her.

Lifesnow nodded, more confused than ever. "When Mousestripe gave birth, those toms were born first. From what I've been told, it was terrifying because their pelt colors turned into silver-blue, and their eye color changed as well, turning to green and at times gleaming red. It was Moonstar's intention to possess all three of Mousestripe's kits with herself in order to grow MoonClan again after it had fallen."

"But what happened? Stormnight and Graytail don't have Moonstar in them," Lifesnow pointed out.

"Not anymore. When Shinypelt was born, her pelt did not change color. Instead, it began to glow brightly, vanishing the spirit of Moonstar from the nursery and saving Stormnight and Graytail. Unfortunately, their pelt colors remained the same, and the scars and patches of missing fur is a visible sign of Moonstar leaving their bodies. A tiny bit of Moonstar still remains in them though, even if it's not really noticeable anymore. When they were kits, they would sometimes have outlashes and break out into violence. Mousestripe would weep and try to protect them. They did not have much of a kithood. By the time they became warriors though, they managed to keep these outbursts under control by controlling their anger."

"And Shinypelt?" Lifesnow asked.

"Right. Well, Moonstar managed to get her daughter to carry out her dirty work for her, because MoonClan attacked with a new army, much larger and bigger than many many moons before. And then Shinypelt stopped the fighting, claiming she could defeat them all, that she'd learned how to use her powers."

Lifesnow was confused. There had been no mention of Lifesnow herself.

"Shinypelt's pelt began to glow, despite our efforts to keep her from using these strong powers. The glow was so bright, it blinded everyone in sight, and the whole forest lit up. When we regained our sight, every evil MoonClan cat was gone, and for a moment, we rejoiced. Then, we realized Shinypelt's dead body was lying limp on the floor. She'd given herself up to save the clans."

Lifesnow nodded, suddenly aware why so many cats praised her. Expecting this to be the end of the story, Lifesnow stood up, then sat down as Patchfur opened his mouth again.

"We were about to grab her body and bring it back to camp, when it began floating towards the sky. Blue lights dazzled around her, creating a different sort of light. A transformation occurred when she was in the sky, and when she was lowered down, there was a squirming newborn kitten with white and golden fur and glowing blue eyes..."

"Me," Lifesnow gasped.

Patchfur nodded. "You."

"But I thought Shinypelt was pregnant and gave birth to me before battle!" Lifesnow exclaimed, suddenly furious that this lie had been kept so long.

"She was never pregnant. You are the kit that came from the sky."

"But, what does that mean? Am I even your kit? Am I Shinypelt?"

"That I don't know," Patchfur replied.

Lifesnow felt herself becoming furious. "That's why you never acted like my father?! You think I'm Shinypelt, don't you? Am I supposed to be your mate or something?! Am I Shinypelt? Am I supposed to have all these memories of her life? Am I a reincarnation?!"

"That's not true! You're Lifesnow, not Shinypelt," Patchfur argued.

"But it doesn't make sense! I look just like her, everyone says. Am I Shinypelt? Am I another cat? Who am I?" she asked, looking at Patchfur with sad eyes.

"I-I don't know who you are," he admitted. "But the dreams, you say they're only of kithood."

"Yeah, why?"

"Well, if you were a true reincarnation, perhaps you'd have dreams of her entire life?"

"The prophecy," Lifesnow gasped, thinking of how Thornstar warned her of four others.

"Lifesnow, this may be confusing, but we can work through this," Patchfur offered.

"No!" she shouted. "Get away from me! I can't even really call you my father anymore, can I?"

"Lifesnow!"

"Why not just call me Shinypelt?!" she shouted, storming away from her father.

Patchfur did not pursue her, and Lifesnow rushed into the warriors den, finding Goosefur sitting on his nest.

"Are you okay?" he asked.

"No," she murmured, laying down and shutting her eyes, trying to block out all these new visions and thoughts.

Chapter 49

As much as Salmon tried to obey her father's orders, it could not happen. For no matter how hard she tried to see his reasoning, she could not bring herself to love Storm. That very afternoon her father had made the announcement to the tribe that Storm would be Salmon's mate and heir to throne. And while the tribe seemed happy, Salmon grimaced at Storm's widened smile, expecting him to enjoy this moment.

Salmon had tried reasoning with her father, but he stopped hearing her complaints. After awhile, Salmon just eventually stopped complaining, knowing there was no way to stop this from happening. This was how it had always been, and she would have to be Storm's mate.

But why couldn't her father have picked a different tom? Salmon knew very well she had made no acquaintances with any other toms, and the other toms in her tribe were younger and not as fit and strong as Storm. But couldn't he have respected her free will?

Storm surprisingly did not seem too upset. Salmon assumed it was because he was thrilled to finally receive his dream job of leading, but he didn't act that way. In fact, he seemed rather content, never bragging and for once acting like a normal cat.

Salmon didn't enjoy this new Storm. He acted somewhat polite to her, bringing her fresh prey every morning, never expecting anything in return. He had been forced to bring his nest close to hers, and while Salmon flinched when his fur rubbed against hers, the warmth of his fur was somewhat comforting on cold nights.

And most of the time they spent together contained nothing but silence. Salmon had expected him to be snarky, rude, uncouth, much like he probably expected her to be. The silence was tolerable though, and she preferred it to when he tried to spark any conversation.

Oak seemed to notice the lack of chemistry between them though, and lately, he'd been trying to get them to do more together, whether it be hunting, chatting, sharing a squirrel. He made it clear he wanted them to work together as a team.

But as time passed, Salmon grew further away from Storm, and her dreams continued. Now she knew very well the tom, Patchfur, and she often wished Storm were like him--kind, caring, not a show-off for sure.

Salmon was currently caught in a dream, finding herself in the familiar camp. She had finally concluded that she was a clan cat in these dreams, and she surprisingly found their lifestyle not too different. Well, she-cats could choose their mates in a clan.

She stood in a forest, knowing already that it was summer. The heat swarmed through the forest, but she did not mind so much. In the distance stood Patchfur, standing proudly on a ledge up ahead, looking over the river that ran through the meadow.

Salmon purred and padded towards him on cue, watching as he spun around, his bright green eyes lighting up at the sight of her.

"Good morning," he spoke calmly.

Salmon padded up towards him and stood by him, looking over the river.

"How are you?" she asked.

"Hot day," he noted.

She nodded, intertwining her tail with his. They both stood in silence, but unlike the awkward silence she and Storm often kept, this silence was peaceful and relaxing. Words were not needed to describe the event.

"I meant to talk to you about something," Patchfur spoke.

Salmon tilted her head. "What is it?"

"Do-do you think you could see us having kits someday, Shinypelt?"

he asked, stammering and blushing.

She purred, words flowing out of her mouth like silk. "Maybe...maybe..."

Suddenly, the forest, the ledge, the river--it all faded, and Salmon awoke to feel Storm poking her with his large gray paw gently.

"What?" she growled, now missing the fantasyland in her dreams. Coming back to reality after a pleasant dream was torture for her.

"Oak wants us to go hunting," Storm explained. "We can share a mouse and then go."

Salmon nodded and stood up, padding outside with Storm. He picked a fresh mouse from the prey pile and dropped it near her. Salmon wasn't too hungry though, and she only nibbled at it.

"Come on, you've got to eat more than that," Storm urged her. Salmon eyed him. They never told each other what to do, and she felt a low grumble in her throat.

"I'm not hungry."

"I caught this mouse yesterday," he explained. "It was zipping all over the place, messing around with me. I chased it across the entire forest, even suffering from a bite on the paw, and now you will not eat this masterpiece?"

Salmon couldn't help but giggle a little. Seeing Storm chase after a measly mouse humored her. "Well, I'm sorry your hard work went to waste," she spoke jokingly.

"Just take one bite and tell me it's the best mouse you've ever tasted," Storm urged.

Salmon rolled her eyes and took a bite. To her surprise, the mouse was especially delicious, especially for the autumn season. It was nice and juicy, and she took another bite, grinning.

"You're right," she spoke with her mouth full. "It is quite delicious."

Storm laughed and once they finished, they were off towards the forest. Salmon found it odd that Storm was somewhat enjoyable at breakfast, but she assumed the feeling would pass. Even if he hadn't acted like a big piece of fox-dung lately, she still would never feel any affection towards him.

The woods stood ahead, the colors of the leaves bright. It was as if they had been painted in orange, red, and yellow, and Salmon purred, racing inside. Storm followed her, and they began their hunt. They only looked around at first, keeping quiet.

Salmon sniffed the air, looking for some piece of prey to catch. Storm did the same, searching in the opposite direction. Salmon listened to the wind whistle beneath the trees, taking deep breaths of autumn air.

She pricked her ears, hoping to hear the sound of some animal nearby. Hearing a sudden scurry of feet, she glanced up, hoping to find a meal. Instead, she found Storm chasing furiously after a squirrel, swiping at it.

She watched laughing to herself. The tom had always been a good hunter, so why was he struggling catching this tiny squirrel?

The squirrel turned left, and Storm turned too quickly, tripping and landing face-first into a tree. Salmon, now taking the opportunity to catch the squirrel, leapt over the tom and raced after the gray squirrel, quickly catching up to it.

She leapt into the air, bringing her claws down on the squirrel's back. In mere seconds, it was dead, and she happily dropped the dead squirrel near the sulking Storm, who was rubbing his head and growling.

She laughed, sitting down next to him. "Here, you eat it. I'm not hungry."

Storm only shook his head. "We'll bring it back for the tribe."

"Uh...your head okay?" Salmon asked, not sure if mates were supposed to worry about their mate's health. She knew Storm was

fine, but it was polite to ask, she guessed.

"Yeah, just bruised it, I guess," Storm spoke, rubbing his head with his tail.

"Maybe you should see Berry," Salmon suggested.

"Later. Let's just sit for a bit," he suggested.

"Oh, okay," Salmon agreed. She assumed they'd just be heading back, but maybe Storm found sitting in the woods was relaxing as well.

It was silent for a few moments as Storm closed his eyes and breathed in and out. Salmon awkwardly sat next to him, occasionally glancing over at the tom. He was so calm, his eyes closed. She focused on his face, noticing the way his whiskers curved, the smoothness of his fur, his pointed ears.

She shook these thoughts away quickly. Since when did she care what Storm looked like?

Storm opened his eyes, looking at Salmon. "I love you," he said.

"Uh, what?" she asked, completely taken aback. She stood up and turned her back from him. What sort of sick game was he playing?

"I know, I know, you don't believe me," Storm said, standing up. "But it's true. I always have."

"Yeah, right. Since when have you ever showed you loved me?" Salmon growled.

"I know you always thought I was jealous of you, but that wasn't necessarily the case. Yeah, I wanted to be leader, but I also wanted you to be mine. You were so cool with your hunting and fighting, and so I did my best to impress you. But you hated me the moment you set eyes on me, and the only way I could get your attention was to act unkind to you too. I know that was stupid and didn't work, but I really do love you, Salmon."

"No you don't. Leave me alone," Salmon growled, turning around to

face him. She suddenly noticed the desperation in Storm's eyes. He was not lying.

"I'm sorry Oak made this decision, but it honestly has been the best. I like getting to know you, and I'm sorry you were forced to be mates with me, but I think we should know each other better. We haven't fought since the decision was made, and today was a lot of fun."

"Storm," Salmon began.

"And I know I've done unkind things to you, and it's lame to be apologizing this late, but if you could give me another chance," he begged. "I'll show you how caring I can be, I'll show you I can lead, that we can make this work."

"Storm," she sighed, her heart pumping quickly. She took a step forward, and his eyes focused on hers. For a moment, she was about to give into this odd feeling in her chest. Seeing Storm there so innocent, so loving, she could almost give him a second chance.

Storm was close to her, she close to him. She glanced up at him, and he glanced up at her, awaiting a response.

Salmon leaned forward, about to nuzzle him, but she pulled back, her eyes going cold. "I can't love you," she said. "I can't forgive you." With those words, she saw hurt in his eyes, and she turned away and ran away.

"SALMON, WAIT!" Storm called, but she ignored him, running instead to her mother's cherry blossom tree. Tears drizzled from her eyes, and she finally stopped by the tree, the leaves nearly gone.

"Why are you never blooming when I have troubles?" she asked miserably, looking at the tree. She laughed a little, the laughs turning to tears. And for awhile, she just sat there crying, knowing she could not love Storm, but at the same time wanting to.

These thoughts troubled her until something caught her eye. Something glittered under a pile of leaves, and she moved towards the pile, pushing away the dead leaves. She gasped at what she saw.

Buried under the pile of leaves was a sole cherry blossom, broken off from the tree. The petals were still pink and fresh. Salmon glanced at it, confused. How could it still be living and not dead like the others. Perhaps her mother had not left her after all.

Thinking of her mother, she excitedly grabbed the blossom and raced back, discovering Storm had not returned yet either. Knowing she'd have to face him eventually, she hid the blossom underneath her nest, hoping if would remind her that her mother had not given up on her...not yet.

Chapter 50

Lemonfur was awoken by Thymewhisker's tongue rasping against her cheek. She slowly opened her eyes, purring quietly.

"Good morning," he told her, his eyes shining. She smiled back, thankful that he could actually speak to her. She imagined a life where they would have to communicate through sign language forever. Even though it would be possible, it wouldn't be the same. Still, she was often nagged by Bluefur to keep practicing in case something arised.

Lemonfur rose slowly to her feet, trying to find balance. She stood, then trotted outside with her mate, stopping by the fresh-kill pile.

"Anything in particular you want?" he asked.

Lemonfur shook her head, sitting down slowly. Her mind drifted towards the dreams she had the night before. This time, she had been chatting as Shinypelt with her previous mentor, Tawnyheart, jokingly talking about her training.

It was all odd to Lemonfur, these dreams, and she still had not gotten the courage to tell either Ambershine or Silverstar. She knew she had to eventually, but perhaps they were only harmless dreams. They didn't really mean anything.

As Thymewhisker trotted towards her with a dead rabbit, Raspberryblaze jokingly teased, "That's a big piece of prey, Lemonfur."

Lemonfur rolled her eyes, waving good-bye as she ran off on patrol. She glanced down at her stomach, wondering if perhaps she had been eating too much lately. But she'd been hungry! So was every other cat! With leaf-bare in a matter of moons, prey was beginning to get scarce, and soon, the whole clan would be gobbling down any piece of prey they could find.

Thymewhisker growled at Raspberryblaze as he padded away, saying, "We're sharing it, mouse-brain!"

Raspberryblaze only shook her head and laughed, humming to herself as she left. Thymewhisker sighed and sat down.

"Sisters," he muttered.

Lemonfur shrugged. "What can you do about them?"

As she took a bite, she frowned, thinking of Raspberryblaze's comment. Had she really meant it?

"Do you think I've been eating too much?" she asked.

Thymewhisker's eyes widened. "What are you talking about?"

"Maybe I'm turning into a fat kittypet," she sighed.

"What, Lemonfur you sound ridiculous. We're all getting hungry. Raspberryblaze was only teasing. She's practically your annoying sister too. Just ignore her."

Lemonfur nodded, grateful for his response, but the thought still burned in her mind. She ate a quarter of the rabbit, feeling guilty, and stood up, a cold wind blowing past her.

"Lemonfur!" Ashclaw, the deputy, called from the edge of camp.

"What?" she called.

"You're on patrol!" he shouted.

Lemonfur turned to Thymewhisker, smiling uneasily. "See you later."

"Bye," he called, waving his tail.

She padded towards the group of cats, finding Frostflight among them. Frostflight and her were even in size now, both of

them the tinier cats in the clan. Frostflight grinned at Lemonfur as she approached.

"Are you on this patrol too?" Lemonfur asked.

Frostflight nodded. "Yup. I guess we can catch up on things."

"Great," Lemonfur purred. Though she'd become a warrior, it was still hard chatting with Hailfrost and Frostflight often. Still, she made sure she spoke to them as often as possible.

The patrol took off in the woods, Lemonfur following with Frostflight. They were towards the back of the group, but as the patrol progressed, Lemonfur found herself falling further and further behind. Frostflight politely walked with her, as if she hadn't noticed, and Lemonfur picked up her pace, beginning to get tired.

"So, the kits going to be warriors soon?" Lemonfur asked.

"In one moon or so," she purred. "I'm so happy for them!"

"Me too," Lemonfur replied, beginning to pant. "They deserve it."

"Your father and I feel so old," she admitted, laughing a little. "I guess I'm not the young she-cat I was before."

"You're still young," Lemonfur assured her. "I bet you could even have another litter of kits!"

Frostflight laughed, her eyes widening in embarassment. "I've already got six to worry about," she joked, patting Lemonfur with her tail. "And you're the hardest of them all."

Lemonfur rolled her eyes, beginning to fall behind Frostflight now. They had become partially separated from the rest of the patrol.

"Lemonfur, pick up the pace!" Ashclaw called from the front. "This isn't social hour! We're setting borders."

"I'll stay with her," Frostflight suggested, turning to Lemonfur in concern. "Everything okay?"

"Just a bit tired, that's all," Lemonfur assured her mother.

Frostflight eyed her. "Are you sure?"

Lemonfur began to get nervous, wondering if perhaps her mother could read her thoughts and know that the dreams were also bothering her.

"F-Fine," Lemonfur stammered, trying to pick up her pace. She walked past Frostflight, the tiny gray she-cat stopping behind Lemonfur.

"Ah, I remember this," Frostflight spoke quietly.

"What?" Lemonfur asked, spinning around. The other cats had gone up ahead, and Lemonfur assumed she'd just catch up to them in a second.

Frostflight approached Lemonfur, smiling. "Grouchiness, tired, hungry. I think you're pregnant, Lemonfur."

"What? No, I'm not!" Lemonfur argued, secretly relieved Frostflight hadn't mentioned any dreams.

"Just look at yourself! You just thought you were getting a little fat?" she asked.

Lemonfur glanced down. She hadn't even noticed that. Raspberryblaze's comment had made her think so. Perhaps her friend had noticed Lemonfur's weight gain.

Suddenly, it began to make sense. Why she was so hungry and tired, why she struggled to keep up.

"I can't be certain. Maybe you are just eating too much," Frostflight teased. "But I would talk to Ambershine."

"Do you think they'll mind if I head back?" Lemonfur asked, motioning to the patrol ahead.

"I'll let them know," Frostflight promised her, running ahead. "You go see Ambershine!"

Lemonfur nodded, beginning to make her way back to camp. She was afraid of running into Thymewhisker, unsure of whether to tell him or not. But what if she wasn't pregnant? Wouldn't that just be a let-down for him?

Either way, she felt like she was going to burst from anxiety as she padded through NightClan's woods, the leaves almost bare. Piles of multicolored leaves lay in piles on the ground, and Lemonfur quietly tromped through them, thinking of her first leaf-fall only moons before as a kit in the nursery. She'd barely been able to see everything before it snowed.

The thoughts of leaf-fall calmed her, and, making her way into camp, she quickly diverted her route from Thymewhisker's and snuck into the medicine cat den, finding Ambershine fixing up an apprentice's paw.

Ambershine glanced up, her eyes falling on Lemonfur.

"Oh, Lemonfur, welcome," she spoke, still examining the paw. "Just a second."

Lemonfur nodded, waiting patiently as Ambershine finished her examination.

"All right, you're good. Just try not to step into any more thorn bushes," Ambershine purred.

"Thanks!" the apprentice called, scurrying out of the den.

Ambershine approached, smiling calmly. "How can I help you?"

"Um..." Lemonfur paused, an awkward silence forming between them. "I think I'm...expecting kits."

She expected Ambershine to be surprised, but the calico only smiled. "Well, let's just see here," she said, standing by Lemonfur. Lemonfur felt awkward as she walked around her,

occasionally feeling her enlarged belly.

"Well, I'd say you're correct!" Ambershine exclaimed.

"I-I am expecting kits?!" Lemonfur gasped.

Ambershine nodded. "Oh, yes. They should be due at the very end of leaf-fall, just as the final leaves fall."

I'm going to be a mother, Lemonfur thought. *How can I possibly be a mother?*

"Congratulations," Ambershine told her. "I'm assuming they're Thymewhisker's."

Lemonfur nodded, her throat chalky and dry.

"He'll be so proud. It's best we meet up often then to discuss progress. You'll have to move into the nursery at some point," Ambershine explained.

Lemonfur nodded, only half-listening. Besides the terrifying thought of caring for kits and bringing them into the world around leaf-bare, she thought of the dreams.

"I'll see you then!" Ambershine called.

Lemonfur nodded, making her way out the door. She stopped, then turned around. "Wait," she spoke.

"What is it?" Ambershine asked, concerned.

"It's not about the kits, but I've been having...dreams," Lemonfur said quietly.

"Dreams? Like what?" Ambershine asked, sitting down.

Lemonfur sat down across from her, sighing. "For a couple moons now, I keep dreaming I'm some she-cat in another forest, living another life. I thought they were just dreams, but they feel almost like...like memories."

"Memories," Ambershine repeated, nodding her head. "Why didn't you tell me sooner?"

"I didn't know what to say. I'm a coward," Lemonfur sighed.

"You're not. You were just frightened," Ambershine assured her, touching her with her speckled tail. "Do you know who you are?"

"All I know is that the cats in my dreams call me Shinypelt," Lemonfur explained. "I swear I've heard the name before, but I don't remember where."

Ambershine's eyes widened. "By StarClan!" she gasped.

"What? What?" Lemonfur asked as Ambershine stood up, beginning to pace around the den.

"Shinypelt was the she-cat who took down the MoonClan army!" Ambershine exclaimed. "I should've known it was connected after everything that happened that day."

"But I wasn't found that day, was I?" Lemonfur asked.

"You were," Ambershine explained. "Oh, why didn't I see this before?"

"What?" Lemonfur asked.

"As you know, a kit took Shinypelt's place after her death."

"Am I the kit?" Lemonfur gasped.

Ambershine shook her head. "No, but you were found the same day the kit appeared. Are your dreams of the she-cat's entire life?"

"Only her warriorhood, I'm afraid," Lemonfur explained.

"I believe you may be Shinypelt's reincarnation," Ambershine spoke. "But it doesn't seem possible, considering that the young kit that came down from the sky was also her

reincarnation. Perhaps this is where the four come in!"

"What do I do? Who do I talk to?" Lemonfur asked.

"You must keep an eye out for the other three. As far as we know, one could be in SnowClan, but the other whereabouts are unknown. It all makes sense!"

"Then I'll talk to the one in SnowClan!" Lemonfur suggested.

Ambershine only shook her head. "We don't know if that kit even survived. Perhaps she has, but maybe this is all just in my head. It's better not to get tangled up in SnowClan business right away. Besides, you're pregnant, and you need to think of your kits. Just keep a lookout. I'll let Silverstar know, and maybe we'll allow you into the next gathering if you aren't already in the nursery."

"O-Okay," Lemonfur agreed, stammering slightly. She stood up, thanking Ambershine, then left the den. For a moment, she completely forgot that she was expecting kits. All she thought of was that she could be a reincarnation meaning...perhaps she was one step closer to finding her true identity...her true parents! The thought excited her.

These thoughts came to a cease as Thymewhisker approached, a worried expression on his face.

"Hey, I saw you go into Ambershine's den? Are you okay?" he asked.

"Oh..." Lemonfur spoke. She glanced down, then glanced back up. "I-I'm expecting kits."

Thymewhisker's eyes widened in surprise. "I-I'm going to be a father?!" he gasped.

Lemonfur nodded, smiling as he nuzzled her. He bounced in excitement. "Oh, this is so exciting! Our very own set of kits to care for!"

Lemonfur smiled, glad to see him excited. Raspberryblaze suddenly popped her head out of the warriors den.

"What's this I hear? Are you pregnant, Lemonfur?!"

Lemonfur nodded weakly, watching as Raspberryblaze squealed too. "Wow, I can't wait! Your kits can just call me 'Auntie Raspberryblaze'!"

Lemonfur smiled, watching as both Raspberryblaze and Thymewhisker chatted excitedly. Her mind, however, was still focused on Ambershine's words, and she felt guilt build up inside her as she thought of how her friends and family had no knowledge of this prophecy she was a part of.

Smiling weakly as they congratulated her, she wondered if keeping the prophecy a secret really was for the best...

Chapter 51

Sunrise awoke on a particularly cold autumn morning, glancing out the window to see even more multicolored leaves coating the lawn. Just by the tingling in her fur, she knew snow would be on its way soon.

The boy was still curled asleep in his bed, leaving Sunrise to watch out the window as leaves swirled to the floor. Hungry, she abandoned her post on the windowsill and leapt down onto the floor, padding out of the room and into the kitchen.

Holly and Polly were sleeping on the couch closely together, though from where Sunrise stood, they looked like one huge pillow. She laughed to herself and padded to her food bowl, already finding some cat food inside.

Grinning, she ate quickly and finished it off with a bowl of milk her owner had laid especially out for her. Satisfied, she decided she'd better head outside and keep a lookout for Fawn.

Her mind suddenly was filled with anxious thoughts. The dreams had not stopped, and each night she dreamt she was an apprentice, learning the ways of a warrior. Though she enjoyed it, she kept wondering about the prophecy.

Frog and Anna had come to no conclusions about these dreams. When Sunrise had heard this, her stomach had twisted. Could no one help her truly discover who she was?

And as far as she knew, Fawn had no other dreams of StarClan. It was if the mysterious place had abandoned them after all. No other clues had come, and all Sunrise could do was think of the other three that Fawn had mentioned. Were they real cats? Or maybe they were part of StarClan too?

Padding outside into the crisp autumn air, Sunrise glanced around for her friend, only to find Fawn's usual sitting spot on the fence

abandoned. Frowning, Sunrise leapt up onto the fence and peered into Fawn's backyard, only to find the she-cat not there.

Sunrise sighed, glancing longingly at Fawn's home. Perhaps she had come too early and the she-cat was still sleeping. Lonely, Sunrise decided it best to head towards Anna's instead. Maybe she'd have some stories to tell Sunrise, or something about the prophecy.

Thinking of the prophecy made Sunrise's heart lurch, but she knew Anna would have no other news. She hadn't had any the other days Sunrise had visited.

Sighing, Sunrise slowly trotted along the fence line, watching as humans raked leaves from their lawns, children ran around in autumn coats, dogs barked furiously at Sunrise's appearance. Sunrise only laughed as a dog barked at her and continued along, spotting Anna's house in the distance.

Her heart leaping, she padded a little faster, already hearing Anna mewing. At first, Sunrise believed it was Fawn she was speaking to, but as she came closer, she noticed it was unfamiliar to her.

Slowing down her pace, Sunrise crept by Anna's house, noticing the old she-cat speaking to an entirely new tom. He was young, like Sunrise--a gray tabby tom. A yellow collar was strung along his neck, causing Sunrise's heart to sink. By his muscular arms and legs, she'd nearly mistaken him for a warrior.

"Sunrise, dear, is that you?" Anna called, catching Sunrise's gaze.

Sunrise squatted down, wishing she could just run away, but she'd already been seen. The tom turned too in curiosity, and Sunrise was forced to leap down from the fence and land in Anna's backyard. She smiled weakly, padding towards the two.

"Hey, Anna," she said, waving her ginger and white tail at the she-cat. "Who's this?"

Anna grinned. "This is Boulder, Sunrise. Sunrise, Boulder. Boulder, Sunrise."

Boulder smiled warmly, his bright amber eyes leaving an

impression in Sunrise's mind. He sure was handsome, she had to give him that.

"Nice to meet you," he purred, dipping his head.

"And you," she responded, repeating the gesture.

"I must admit, I was quite jealous when I learned my owners were getting a new cat, but he is such a nice tom!" Anna exclaimed.

"You mean he's living with you?" Sunrise asked, surprised. Would Boulder get in the way of her relationship with Anna, Fawn, and Frog? Would he be drawn into clan business?

Anna nodded. "He's quite polite! I'm so thrilled to have him!"

"Oh, stop," Boulder purred. "Do any other cats live with you, Sunrise? I'd love to meet them."

"My two sisters," Sunrise told him. "But honestly, I think it'd be best if you did not meet them. They're quite annoying and rude. Plus, they're a bit too fat to get out the cat door."

At this, Boulder laughed, and even Anna chuckled a little.

"Well, maybe I'll meet them one day," Boulder replied. Sunrise admired how kind this tom was. Perhaps she was judging him too harshly. He seemed like a nice tom.

"But there are other nice cats you must meet. You've met Frog, even if the introduction did not go well," Anna explained to Boulder. "And then there's Fawn. Oh, you'll love her. She's the sweetest! Good friend of Sunrise's."

Sunrise nodded. "It was actually Fawn that introduced me to Anna and Frog," she told Boulder.

"Well, I'd love to meet her--" Boulder was cut off by a startling screech. Fawn was racing down the fence line, birds scattering in fear around her. Sunrise turned in surprise. The she-cat looked wild, her eyes bloodshot, her paws leaping quickly, her tail waving in the air.

Sunrise groaned. So much for first impressions, she thought.

"And that would be Fawn," Sunrise groaned, looking down.

"ANNA! SUNRISE!" Fawn screeched, coming to halt at Anna's backyard. She leapt down, immediately striding past Boulder. "We must talk now."

"Yes, but you must meet Boulder first. He's living in my home," Anna purred.

"Hi," Fawn said quickly, glancing at Boulder. "Anna, please!"

"Should I...go?" Boulder asked, gesturing his tail to the door.

Anna frowned. "Unfortunately I suppose so. I'll head inside in a few moments."

"Well, Sunrise...Fawn," Boulder said, dipping his head and exiting awkwardly. He seemed frightened.

"I swear, we're normal!" Sunrise called, watching as he left. She felt her heart sink as he disappeared. That had gone well...

"GET FROG!" Fawn exclaimed.

"Fawn, what is going on?!" Sunrise hissed. "You barge into here like a cat with rabies and then scare off--"

"STARCLAN HAS SPOKEN TO ME! SHUT IT!" she spat at Sunrise, fuming.

Sunrise sat down, looking hurt. She had never seen Fawn act this angry or act so cruel.

Fawn immediately shook her head, her eyes retaining their calm figure. "Sorry, Sunrise, but this is important."

"What's all the ruckus?" Frog growled, leaping into Anna's backyard.

"It seems Fawn has information," Anna told him.

"Well, what is it?" Frog asked.

"Sunrise," Fawn said, turning to her. "Was your mother's name Caramel?"

"Yes, but how did you--"

"StarClan sent me a vision Sunrise, of you as a kit."

"M-Me?" she gasped, surprised. "But why?"

"Tell us everything," Anna pleaded.

"I thought perhaps I was in StarClan, but then I realized it was a memory. It all started at this little yellow house near the woods..."

Sunrise's mind immediately flashed to her old home. This had been a vision of memory.

"There was this large flash as this brown she-cat was giving birth. I watched the whole birth, saw her--Caramel, excuse me, give birth to five kits. Then, her humans left for a moment to fetch collars, and the she-cat heard a sound from the other side of the fence."

Sunrise sucked in her breath. There were six in her litter, not five...

"And so Caramel went to investigate. On the other side of the fence, she found a small newborn kitten with white fur and gold patches...You, Sunrise."

Sunrise felt as if she'd be sick. She stood up, but Anna pushed her back down.

"It's got to be another cat. I'm a kittypet!" Sunrise argued. She froze, not realizing she'd been using clan slang. It had just come to her.

"You are not Caramel's kit. Don't you understand, Sunrise?! It all makes sense! You're so much different from your siblings, physically and emotionally. And you were found near the woods. Perhaps you are a clan cat!"

Sunrise's heart raced at this. Could it be possible? But then she wondered what irresponsible clan cats would leave their child alone in the woods. Why had her parents abandoned her?

"Why didn't I see it before!" Frog growled.

"What?" Sunrise asked.

"Reincarnation!"

"Excuse me?" Sunrise wondered.

"You say that there were three others in the dream, Fawn, right?"

Fawn nodded. "The prophecy mentions four cats."

"Perhaps you are a reincarnation then of a cat, and so are these three. I don't know how it would be possible, but reincarnations are not unheard of in the clans."

"You must find the other three, Sunrise," Anna ordered. "Perhaps they'll bring you closer to learning of the prophecy and who you are. Now that we know you are not a house cat, perhaps these cats will have answers."

"But I might be!" Sunrise argued. "I could very well be a house cat."

"Look for the other three," Anna ordered again.

Frog nodded. "Yes, Anna is right. Finding the others may help."

"Well, where do I even look?!" Sunrise exclaimed. All were quiet.

"No, you don't mean I should go in the woods, do you?! I'd be ripped to shreds! They don't like kittypets," Sunrise told them.

"Speaking to clan cats may be the best option. They may have answers and more information," Fawn told her. "It'll be fine. But you must start looking, Sunrise. This could be the key to unveiling the truth."

Sunrise nodded, gulping. All her life she'd wanted to be a clan cat, but now, she was terrified of the truth...

Chapter 52

Lifesnow sat in the warriors den, sulking to herself. It had been three sunrises since she'd found out the truth, and she'd been keeping to her own business, angry with her father, herself, her mother, every cat. Why had Patchfur never told her any of this? Why had Thornstar kept it a secret? Why had the clan kept it a secret?!

Goosefur had been giving her distance, though he often checked on her. Lifesnow tried to act fine around him, but it was obvious the tom knew that something was troubling her. She supposed it was only a matter of time before he questioned her further.

As for her dreams, they had continued, though they had only been memories of kithood. Perhaps that all did tie into the prophecy somehow. Were the other three also reincarnations? It seemed impossible. Perhaps Lifesnow was the only one. Still, she was trapped in a world swirled with lies, fables, and confusion. Who even was she anymore?

"Lifesnow," came a familiar voice.

The she-cat looked up to see Goosefur standing in the entrance of the den, smiling at her. She smiled weakly back at him.

"Hey," she called from her nest.

He padded inside and laid down on his nest next to her, glancing at her with concern. "Everything okay?"

"Fine," she lied.

"Ripplepaw told me she's going to become a full medicine cat soon," Goosefur explained.

"Really?" Lifesnow asked. "Good for her."

"Yeah. Next full moon, Spiritheart will take her to Moonstone. Maybe if you'd come outside you'd hear more about it. I'm sure you want to congratulate her," Goosefur urged.

"You can congratulate her for me," Lifesnow offered.

"Come on. You need to get out of this den. Can we at least go walk in the forest?" he asked.

Lifesnow paused, not wanting to see Patchfur in camp. She'd been avoiding him the past three days, and though he'd try to communicate with her, she'd easily shoo him away. It seemed he was as confused and hurt as she was.

"Come on," Goosefur repeated. "Get some sunlight."

"Fine," Lifesnow growled, rising to her feet. She padded outside the dim den into the sunlight, blinking as the white light blinded her. Soon, she adjusted, and she followed the tom into the forest, shade quickly covering them.

Lifesnow trotted quietly alongside her mate, watching him stride alongside her. She loved to see him caring, and for a moment, all was forgotten about her dilemna. Soon though, she recalled that she wasn't even sure who she was, and she worried again.

"Let's stop here," Goosefur suggested, stopping under a nearby pine tree. It's needles were still green and fresh, whereas most of the trees were multicolored and had lost nearly all their leaves by now. A cold breeze swept past Lifesnow, and she shivered, knowing snow would be coming soon.

"So, what's up?" Goosefur asked.

Lifesnow just stared at him.

"Come on, something's troubling you. I'm not an idiot. And as your mate, I want to help you...whatever you're going through," Goosefur explained.

Lifesnow kept her mouth shut and only stared at him further.

Goosefur gasped. "Are you pregnant?"

"No!" Lifesnow snapped, a little too harshly. Goosefur shrunk down, and Lifesnow sighed. "Sorry. It's just, I haven't been at all honest with you."

"What do you mean?" Goosefur asked.

"Thornstar talked to me the day I became a warrior," Lifesnow began. And Goosefur remained quiet as she relayed the prophecy onto him, telling him every word.

After she finished, Goosefur paused. "Should you be telling me this?"

"Probably not," Lifesnow said. "But you're my mate. You should know I'm in a prophecy."

"But what does it mean?" Goosefur asked.

"That's why I'm upset. Thornstar told me to talk to Patchfur, and so finally, I took up his advice a few days ago. I--" Lifesnow struggled for words, unsure of how to explain the matter to Goosefur.

"My mother was part of a prophecy too," she explained. She started with that, telling Goosefur of Mousestripe's terrible birth story, of how Shinypelt grew up different from her siblings. Finally, she reached the part of the story that involved the MoonClan battle.

"Wait a minute," Goosefur interrupted. "You haven't mentioned your birth at all."

"When my mother fought in the battle, she hadn't given birth to me," Lifesnow explained.

"Wait, what?" Goosefur asked.

"Ever wonder why Shinypelt is talked of so much? She ended the battle. We were losing, Goosefur. Shinypelt used her powers to bring down all of MoonClan." Quickly, she told him of the miraculous event, where Shinypelt ridded the entire MoonClan

army.

"But she was discovered dead as soon as cats regained their senses," Lifesnow explained. "They were just about to grab her body and bring it to camp when she was lifted into the air. By some power of StarClan, her body transformed into a young kit that was white and golden and had bright blue eyes..."

"You," Goosefur gasped.

Lifesnow nodded, tears gathering in her eyes. "I tried to talk to Patchfur, but he was just as confused as I was. I don't know who I am, Goosefur. Am I a reincarnation of Shinypelt? Am I her and Patchfur's kit? Is Patchfur even my father? I just don't know," she wailed.

Goosefur wrapped his tail around his mate. "You're Lifesnow, and you know that. Even if you are a reincarnation, you are not the same as before. You can't live in your mother's shadow, Lifesnow."

"I know," Lifesnow sniffed. "I just want to know who I am. It's all so odd."

"Have you talked to Thornstar?" Goosefur asked.

"Not yet, but I think I've discovered what the prophecy means," Lifesnow told Goosefur.

"What does it mean?"

"I've been having dreams lately of Shinypelt's kithood. I talked to Patchfur about this too, and he told me a true reincarnation would possess all the memories of its former carrier. That made me think back to the other three Thornstar mentioned. It sounds crazy, but what if I'm not the only reincarnation?"

"You mean there are others?" Goosefur asked.

Lifesnow nodded. "I don't know where they'd even be. There aren't any in SnowClan, I can tell you that, but maybe other clans?"

"You need to talk to Thornstar. Maybe he can help you," Goosefur encouraged her.

"I'm scared."

"You can do it, Lifesnow. I know you can," Goosefur purred.

Lifesnow nodded and stood up suddenly, confident. "I'll talk to him. Thanks for being so understanding. I hope this doesn't change anything."

"Of course not," the silver blue tom assured her, rising to face her. "I still love you, and that will never change."

Lifesnow smiled, gently licking his cheek. She waved goodbye and quickly made her way back to the SnowClan camp, her heart pounding with every pawstep. She raced into camp, cats glancing at her, bewildered by her excitement.

"Thornstar, where is he?" Lifesnow asked.

"In his den," Pinethorn answered. "Is something wrong?"

Lifesnow shook her head. "I just need to talk to him."

She pushed her way past cats and made her way to Thornstar's den, finding him in the middle of a discussion with one of the warriors.

"Excuse me," she called, interrupting.

"Hey, we're in the middle of a conversation," the warrior, better known as Muddyslash, growled.

"I need to talk to Thornstar," Lifesnow snapped.

Thornstar glanced at Lifesnow, then back at Muddyslash.

"What, you're making me leave?" Muddyslash complained. "She's just a new warrior. I'm an elder warrior!"

"I will speak with you later, Muddyslash," Thornstar told

him.

Muddyslash growled, muttering to himself as he padded past Lifesnow. Lifesnow entered, too anxious to sit down. She paced around Thornstar's den, the golden-brown tom watching her with curiousity.

"May I help you?" he asked.

"I talked to Patchfur," Lifesnow told him.

Thornstar's eyes widened. "You surely know everything there is to know now, don't you?"

Lifesnow nodded, finally deciding on sitting down across from him. "But why was it kept a secret?"

Thornstar sighed. "It was not my intention. Patchfur asked Cloudstar, and so I've been told to continue keeping it a secret. He wanted you to live a normal life, Lifesnow."

"Well, that worked out well," she snortted.

"I'm sorry. I wish I could've told you. Is there anything else troubling you?"

"I think I understand the prophecy," Lifesnow told him.

"What do you mean? How?" Thornstar asked, surprised.

"I haven't been honest with you either, and for that, I apologize, Thornstar. But I've been having dreams, or experiencing memories, of Shinypelt's kithood. I understand a reincarnation should possess all the memories, but I only possess some, or, perhaps, a quarter."

Thornstar's eyes widened. "Do you mean?"

Lifesnow nodded. "I think there are three other reincarnations. I believe that we are all the same, and that they possess the other memories."

Thornstar nodded. "Yes, it makes sense! This is extraordinary, Lifesnow! I can't believe you figured this out!"

"It didn't take much thought," Lifesnow said.

"You must look for the other three then. Do you know where they are?"

Lifesnow shook her head, watching as disappointment flooded in Thornstar's eyes.

"Well, we'll conduct a search. I'll send out patrols, we'll look at every clan. Soon, we can unveil this mystery together."

"You think you can find them?" Lifesnow asked.

Thornstar looked at her with certainty in his eyes. "We will try our hardest. By just finding one, I'm sure we could find the others. I'll let you know if we hear any news."

"Thank you, Thornstar," Lifesnow said, dipping her head and excusing herself. As she padded out his den, she could hear the tom reply, "No. Thank you, Lifesnow."

Chapter 53

Sunrise paced impatiently in the front room of her house, ignoring the sounds of the crackling fire and purrs of her sisters who were curled next to the warm flames. Outside, a cold wind had swept throughout the town, swinging brightly colored leaves into the air.

It had been a few days since talking with the others, and Sunrise still could not believe how much of an impact it had been made. She was not Caramel's daughter after all. In fact, she wasn't sure whose daughter she was.

She had not told Holly and Polly of this shocking surprise, but she was somewhat glad to know that she was not related to such annoying and wicked cats. But this left her with wonder, wondering perhaps if maybe she was of clan cat descent and that was why she was part of the prophecy.

During the past few days, she'd barely spoken with the others, keeping to herself her thoughts of fear. She'd spoken a little to Boulder, the new tom. He seemed nice enough, but totally unaware of the circumstances. In fact, she enjoyed talking to him because he did not remind her of her dilemma.

Standing now by the fire, Sunrise knew she'd have to venture into the woods eventually...and soon. She was frightened, even if it had been a dream of hers to meet clan cats and live in a clan. But the thought of actually stepping into the woods had been absolutely terrifying.

Sunrise also knew this was a task she'd have to face herself, not with the help of Anna, Fawn, or Frog. This was her destiny she had to discover, and it was going to have to be her that went into the woods to further investigate the truth.

Sunrise shuddered thinking about the experience, but she knew it had to occur soon. Glancing outside, she looked at the gray clouds rolling across the sky, and for some reason, she knew tonight had to

be the night.

I have to enter at some point, Sunrise decided. Even if it will be terrifying.

Thoughts came to her of being attacked and killed mercilessly by clan cats as she wailed to them so she could explain. But she shook these thoughts away, knowing she had to try. The plan was to leave tonight. When she would be back...she didn't know.

Dinner was served to her shortly after making this decision, and she gobbled up her dry cat food, wondering if she'd ever eat this cat food again. For some reason, she felt nothing would be the same after her adventure.

Even Holly and Polly seemed to notice something was off as Sunrise remained quiet and unphased by their every move.

Sunrise sat on the couch with the young boy, thankful for his fingers rushing through her fur. She purred, wondering how long it would be before she saw him again. He was so kind, so gentle to her. She didn't want to leave him. In fact, she wished he could come with her out of all people. She wished she could at least explain to him what was going on.

The wind howled as the members of the household went to bed. Sunrise followed the boy into his bedroom, mewing in disapproval as he shut the door. Sighing, he opened it, rubbing her head as he crawled into bed.

"Sometimes, I don't understand you," he said calmly, shutting off his lamp. He was asleep in moments, and Sunrise herself curled up beside him, feeling his body rise and fall beside hers. She decided herself to get a bit of sleep before her journey, and she shut her eyes.

Despite her every attempt to sleep, it was not happening. She kept having visions of what would go wrong on her journey into the woods, and for hours, she tossed and turned before eventually falling asleep on the boy's warm rug.

When opening her eyes, Sunrise found it was not yet sunrise. Her muscles ached, and her eyes stung. Though she'd slept, it had been a rough few hours, and she didn't feel any more refreshed than when she'd gone to bed.

Taking a deep breath, she glanced at the boy, wondering if she should really make this decision. Tears gathering in her eyes, she turned away and padded outside his bedroom, making her way past other parts of the house.

She thought of all the memories she'd made here, and she hoped if she came back, she'd still be able to experience joy from those memories.

Crawling across the kitchen floor to the back door, Sunrise wondered if the cat door had been locked up. A part of her wished it would be, just so she wouldn't have to make the journey, but she found it surprisingly open, as if it were destined to happen.

"Good-bye," she whispered, turning around to look at her loving home one last time. She slipped out the door into the windy night, seeing the sky was not pitch black but a form of indigo at this time. Sunrise was approaching.

She stood in her backyard for a few moments, feeling leaves fly past her and the wind tickle her fur. Then, she leapt onto her fence and began weaving her way past the other houses, determined to come to the forest.

She did not plan to tell the others she was leaving. She supposed they'd already have an idea Sunrise would plan to do this, and besides, she didn't mean that much to them anyway, did she? Sunrise knew this was a lie, but it was easier to think this as she left her neighborhood.

She made her way to the large trees in the distance, making her way to the sidewalk of the neighborhood. Suddenly, a sound came from behind her. Sunrise spun around but noticed nothing. She stood there a few moments longer, then continued on her way.

"Pst...Sunrise!" the voice came again.

Knowing this sound could not be mistaken for wind, she spun around to find Boulder standing on the fence, glancing at her curiously. His green eyes were filled with innocence as he glanced at her confusedly.

"Boulder!" she gasped. "What are you doing here?!"

"I could ask you the same. Why are you out here so early and leaving the neighborhood?" he asked.

Sunrise gulped, knowing she could not make up a coherent excuse. "I-I'm going to the woods."

"What?!" Boulder gasped. "Are you insane?! There are wild animals in there and vicious cats! Is this what Anna and the others were talking about?"

"Yes," Sunrise confirmed. "Look, Boulder I've got to do this. I need to know who I am, and these cats may help."

"Yeah, they'll rip you to shreds!" Boulder exclaimed. "You've got to turn back or tell the others!"

"I can't do that," Sunrise sighed. "I have to do this."

"Then I'll come with you," Boulder offered.

"No!" Sunrise shouted too quickly. She blushed, then glanced back up at the gray tom. "I'm sorry, but you don't understand any of this and wouldn't last a second."

"But someone's got to protect you!" Boulder argued, tears gathering in his eyes.

"I'll be fine," she assured him, touched to see he cared for the small friendship they'd made.

"I can't change your mind, can I?" he sighed.

Sunrise shook her head.

"How long will you be gone?" he asked.

Sunrise sighed. "Hopefully not too long. Look, give me a few days, and then tell Anna and Fawn and Frog about me, okay?"

"But what if it's too late?" Boulder asked.

"It won't be," Sunrise replied, uncertain if this was true. "Thanks, Boulder. You're a good friend."

Boulder smiled weakly. "Please stay safe. I mean, Anna, and Fawn, and Frog, and my-myself...we would be worried if something happened," he stammered.

"I'll be okay," she said, waving her tail as she continued on her way. She glanced back only once, seeing Boulder sitting sadly on the fence as he watched her go.

The rest of the journey wasn't too easy. She dropped down on the sidewalk and made her way to the large plentitude of trees, her heart pounding faster with each step. As she came out of the neighborhood, she came into a golden field, approaching the entrance of the forest. Never had she been this far from home before.

She came slowly to the entrance of the woods, sniffing the air. It smelled so different from how it had before. Sighing, she took a step inside, knowing now it was time to find answers.

The sun was beginning to rise, casting orange hues of color across the sky. With a tiny bit of light, Sunrise felt a bit comforted, and she trotted slowly through the woods, entering deeper and deeper and farther and farther from the home she'd known.

The woods were not necessarily as scary as she believed. In fact, they were kind of beautiful with their vibrant fall colors and quiet sounds. Perhaps it wasn't as dangerous as others believed.

She walked for quite awhile, wondering if there was some clan nearby. At some point, she picked up a new scent, but it disappeared moments later, and she wondered if perhaps a cat was nearby.

The sun's rays were beginning to shine on the beautiful forest now,

and for a minute, Sunrise was living her dream. She imagined herself as a clan cat on an early hunt, frolicking through a forest of colors.

Excited, she began to run now, giggling to herself as she chased after a robin that had landed on a branch. It moved away, and Sunrise laughed as she ran after it, continuing to run long after it had vanished from her sight.

She collapsed into grass, laughing and rolling around. The forest was so beautiful, so great. Why had she been frightened.

The sound of a cracked stick made her jump. That's why she'd thought it was dangerous. She turned her head and found a pair of ears sticking up from a bush in the distance. She remained frozen, slowly rising to her feet.

"Who's there?" came a snarling voice.

"Please don't hurt me," Sunrise begged, watching as the cat whom the voice belonged to stepped out from the bushes.

Sunrise had expected a large muscular tom with razor sharp claws and blood stained teeth. This cat, however, was a tiny she-cat with white and golden patched and bright blue eyes. Sunrise at first thought she was glancing at a reflection of herself.

"You-you look like me," Sunrise gasped.

The other she-cat looked just as surprised. She was silent for a few moments. "It can't be."

"What can't be? I've been looking for you!" Sunrise exclaimed. "My name is Sunrise. I'm a house cat, or at least I thought I was until a few days ago. Who are you? Are you a clan cat?"

"A prophecy. Were you given a prophecy?" the she-cat asked.

Sunrise nodded her head vigorously. "Yes. Were you as well?"

The she-cat nodded, then began shouting in joy. "Oh, finally, I've found one! I was correct! My name is Lifesnow!"

"Lifesnow! Are you a clan cat?" Sunrise asked.

Lifesnow nodded vigorously. "I'm a SnowClan member. Wow, this will clear up so much! We've been looking for more information. You'll need to come back to camp with me immediately."

"Wait, you know what this all means?" Sunrise wondered.

"Oh, yes," Lifesnow confirmed. "Please, you've got to come back to camp."

Sunrise hesitated. "But I'm a kittypet. Don't you clan cats not like me?"

"This is different," Lifesnow assured her. "Come on. Everything will be explained."

Sunrise glanced back from where she'd come from, unsure whether she should trust the she-cat or not. She sighed, then followed, guessing that this she-cat was the closest she'd get to unveiling the truth.

Chapter 54

Lifesnow trotted uneasily alongside her newfound friend, Sunrise, the bright sun shining on her back. She could barely describe her feelings. She was eager, yet anxious, excited, yet frightened. Was it the best decision bringing this she-cat back to camp with her? After all, she was a kittypet, and the clan would not react well. Still, they looked exactly the same, and she had described a prophecy as well.

Lifesnow glanced at the she-cat, noticing the same patches of gold that ran up Lifesnow's own leg. Why, she even had the same spot of gold on her right ear like Lifesnow. They were nearly identical in every way, except for the collar wrapped around the she-cat's neck.

Sunrise remained silently as they padded through the woods, glancing around. Lifesnow could tell she was nervous to come to SnowClan, but she couldn't find herself offering any support to the young she-cat. She had every right to be terrified.

"We're getting closer," Lifesnow announced as the distant smell of a multitude of cats flooded through her nose. Camp was just through the bushes up ahead.

Sunrise nodded, gulping. Lifesnow led her towards the large barrier of bushes and padded through them, Sunrise following behind uneasily. Unaware of Sunrise's inability to move as swiftly as a warrior, Lifesnow nearly left her behind.

"Uh, wait up!" Sunrise called, struggling to make her way through twigs and leaves. She took a step forward, a stray twig catching onto her collar and wrestling with her.

"Lifesnow!" Sunrise wailed frightened.

Lifesnow spun around and rushed to help the she-cat, moving the twig away from her collar. Sunrise wiggled free and

breathed heavily, her eyes widened in fright.

If she was only frightened by a twig, how frightened will she be of the clan? Lifesnow wondered, pushing past the last wall of leaves until they came into a clearing. Sunrise appeared beside her, her eyes immediately widened.

They had entered the SnowClan camp, and from what Lifesnow could tell, Sunrise had never seen such a beautiful sight before. Cats were trotting around, chatting with each other, sharing tongues, sharing prey. Young kits wrestled around with their siblings, apprentices discussed training. The whole clan seemed to be working together to create a perfect setting.

"Wow," Sunrise gasped. "I-All my life I've been so curious about warriors and clan life. I-I've never thought of it as this."

Lifesnow smiled at the the kittypet. "What did you think it was?"

"To be honest, I thought you'd all be strangling each other. Every cat I've talked to makes you all seem so tough," Sunrise admitted.

Lifesnow laughed. "We aren't that tough, but we still can fight well," she explained. She noticed Sunrise glancing at Lifesnow's sharp claws.

"Don't worry. I won't hurt you," Lifesnow assured her.

Cats had begun to notice the strange kittypet sitting beside Lifesnow. Though they saw them, they only spoke quietly among themselves, none of them daring to approach. Goosefur caught Lifesnow's eyes and trotted over curiously.

"Who's this?" he asked, pointing at Sunrise.

"This is Sunrise," Lifesnow explained. "I found her wandering in the territory. Apparently she's part of the prophecy too!"

"You two look like twins," Goosefur admitted. "If she didn't

have that collar on, I probably couldn't tell you apart."

Sunrise giggled a little at his comment.

"Sunrise, this is Goosefur, my mate," Lifesnow explained.

"Nice to meet you," Goosefur said, dipping his head towards Sunrise. "I'm sure Lifesnow is thrilled to have found you."

"I'm thrilled to have found her too," Sunrise replied.

"Is Thornstar in his den?" Lifesnow asked Goosefur.

"I think so," he replied. As Lifesnow turned towards his den, she felt Goosefur place his tail gently on her shoulder. "Good luck," he said quietly.

Lifesnow nodded, leading Sunrise towards the leader's den. Inside, it was quiet, and Lifesnow could clearly see the golden-brown tom resting in his nest.

"Should we bother him? He appears to be asleep," Sunrise whispered.

"Hey, Thornstar!" Lifesnow shouted, causing the tom to jolt awake. He sat upright, his hair frizzled in several places from his nap.

"Oh, Lifesnow! It's you! And...who is this?" he asked, standing up to get a closer look at Sunrise. It seemed as if he had the same idea as Lifesnow. He eyed Sunrise curiously, a large grin appearing on his face.

'This is Sunrise, a kittypet I found wandering in our territory. We look sort of similar, don't you think?" Lifesnow asked.

Thornstar nodded. "Quite. Let me call Spiritheart in, and we'll discuss this further."

Lifesnow nodded, sitting down with Sunrise in Thornstar's den.

"That's your leader?" Sunrise asked, glancing at him with admiration as he padded outside.

Lifesnow nodded. "Yes."

"I'm surprised no cat has tried to attack me yet," Sunrise admitted, glancing down at her paws uneasily.

"Just wait," Lifesnow teased. Sunrise didn't seem to take this as a joke, and she glanced back at Lifesnow, terrified.

Lifesnow laughed heartily. "I'm kidding. You're here on clan business. No cat will bother you."

Sunrise nodded, sighing in relief.

Thornstar entered moments later with Spiritheart by his side. Before he could even speak, Patchfur rushed into the den.

"Is it true?! Is another found?!" he gasped.

Lifesnow growled to herself, causing Sunrise to glance at her in confusion. It wasn't fair for her to be angry with Patchfur, but she still had mixed feelings about him and was unsure how to feel about him.

"This is Sunrise, Patchfur," Thornstar explained.

The white and gray tom approached Sunrise, his eyes widening. "Why, you look just like Shinypelt too. Except for that collar around your neck."

"Um..." Sunrise was unsure what to say. "Who's Shinypelt?"

"There's a lot we need to explain," Lifesnow explained. "We think that this whole four cats has to do with a cat named Shinypelt."

"Why don't you tell her the story, Lifesnow?" Thornstar suggested.

Lifesnow nodded, turning to face Sunrise. Slowly, she began

telling her of her "mother," or so she believed, and how she'd saved the clans. She talked about how she had been the kit that had come down from the sky, but it was believed that perhaps Shinypelt's "reincarnation" had appeared elsewhere too.

"It makes sense," Sunrise agreed. She looked as if she were trying to wrap her head around everything that had been said.

"You understand it?" Lifesnow asked.

"Sort of," Sunrise replied. "I always thought that I'd been born a kittypet, but my friend, a cat named Fawn, has visions from StarClan. She's the one who told me the prophecy. She had a vision of my 'mother' finding me outside the fence on the outside of the woods."

"Brilliant!" Patchfur exclaimed.

"I'm sorry, who is he?" Sunrise asked.

"He was Shinypelt's mate," Thornstar explained. "We've always thought of him as Lifesnow's father, but for all we know, you both could be reincarnations."

"Does that make us sisters?" Lifesnow asked curiously.

Spiritheart pondered this. "It's all confusing, but in a way, yes. Sunrise, have you had visions of Shinypelt?"

Sunrise nodded vigorously. "I keep dreaming about her training as an apprentice. They're almost like memories."

"That's because they are," Thornstar told her. Sunrise glanced at him in surprise. Thornstar continued pacing around the room.

"Lifesnow has had memories of Shinypelt's warrior life, and you of her apprenticehood. It seems that the memories were split between the four reincarnations."

"Who are the other two?" Sunrise wondered.

"We're still trying to figure that out," Lifesnow explained.

"Yes. It's important we find the other two. I'm not sure what will happen when we bring you four together. The prophecy doesn't specify what will happen when you four unite, but it sounds as if the prophecy will help Shinypelt," Thornstar decided.

"What were the lines again?" Sunrise asked.

Lifesnow, haunted by its words, began reciting it. "As the Moon's shine vanishes and the light burns out, another cat will be lost. Four will come, all the same, but with different stories. The four must unite and rescue the lost cat and theirselves or else the Place of No Stars will gain a star."

"You think Shinypelt is this lost cat?" Patchfur asked.

"We still don't know why this reincarnation with four cats happened," Spiritheart noted. "But it seems it has something to do with the Dark Forest. Whatever happens, you two may be battling the Dark Forest."

Both Lifesnow and Sunrise's faces went grim.

"We don't know that for certain. Yes, the Place of No Stars is the Dark Forest, but it never says anything about fighting. Only saving," Thornstar added, trying to lighten up the mood. "But, it's important we look. We're so close to finding out the truth!"

Lifesnow nodded vigorously.

"So...does this mean I have warrior blood?" Sunrise asked. It was an odd question for her to bring up, but Lifesnow nodded.

"Yeah, I guess. If we're Shinypelt, we have SnowClan blood. Gosh, this is so weird to talk about."

Sunrise nodded. "My head hurts too."

"Lifesnow, why not take Sunrise to the warriors den where she can rest for the night? It'd be a good idea to go to the clans tomorrow and look for other reincarnations."

"You think there may be some in this forest?" Patchfur wondered.

"Sunrise was found at the edge of the forest. They must've all appeared somewhere nearby. Lifesnow, I want you and Sunrise to go to check out the other clans. Maybe you'll find some clues or even meet cats there," Thornstar suggested.

"Sure, if patrols don't kill us first," Lifesnow announced.

"You'll be going on SnowClan business. You'll be fine," Thornstar assured her.

Lifesnow turned, seeing Sunrise looking a bit frightened. SnowClan had proved to accept her, but Lifesnow knew the other clans would not feel the same. It was one thing for a SnowClan cat to trespass on their territory, but a kittypet too? Lifesnow bit her lip thinking of all the trouble she'd go through.

"Thank you for your hospitality, Thornstar," Sunrise spoke at last, dipping her head.

"I'll speak to you early morning tomorrow," Thornstar explained.

Lifesnow nodded, nervously padding outside the den with Sunrise. She led the she-cat quietly towards the den, finding a spare nest near the back. She moved Sunrise's nest towards hers, allowing the she-cat to curl up and sleep.

Lifesnow laid down, noticing Sunrise had already fallen asleep. It seemed the journey and experience had worn her out. Lifesnow laughed to herself and put her head down, watching as Goosefur entered. He laid down on the other side of Lifesnow.

Lifesnow pretended to be asleep, but after a few moments, Goosefur spoke.

"Everything went okay?" he asked.

"Besides the fact I'm heading to the clans tomorrow to interrogate their leaders, it's fine," Lifesnow grumbled.

"You'll be fine," Goosefur purred, licking her ear. "You can do this. You're so close to finding out the truth."

"I know," Lifesnow sighed, shutting her eyes. With Goosefur and Sunrise breathing beside her, she finally fell into light sleep.

Chapter 55

It started off a seemingly normal day for Lemonfur. Her eyes opened to find sunlight streaming through the nursery den, lighting up everything inside. She moved around uncomfortably, still not used to her enlarged belly.

Since she had discovered she was pregnant, Lemonfur's stomach had continued to grow, and now, it had swelled to a large size. Just recently she had been told by Ambershine that it was time for her to move into the nursery. Despite Lemonfur's argument that she still could hunt and fight, Ambershine explained how Lemonfur was due nearly any day and needed the time off.

So while her mate and friends got to hunt all day, Lemonfur was confined in the walls of the nursery, listening to the sound of shrieking kits and mothers just wanting to rest.

Will that be me? Lemonfur thought. She still was unsure if she'd be a good mother or not. She'd always seen herself as Thymewhisker's mate, but being the mother of his kits? It frightened her. She wondered how Frostflight had ever gotten along with Lemonfur and her other kits.

Lemonfur smiled, thinking of how her siblings had finally become warriors not too long ago. She had stood proudly with Frostflight and Hailfrost, congratulating them happily. It was odd to think they'd grown up so fast.

Lemonfur sighed, moving her sore muscles. Being confined in the nursery wasn't the best way to spend time. Thymewhisker often visited her, as did Raspberryblaze. Her mother and father and siblings came by once and awhile too, but she still felt lonely.

The sound of a hungry mewling kit caused Lemonfur to growl slightly. It wasn't so much she hated kits, but she was grouchy. The prophecy still was troubling her, and she still hadn't been able to tell Thymewhisker a single word about the prophecy. The only ones

she talked to about it were Silverstar and Ambershine, both of whom hadn't mentioned it since Lemonfur explained her dreams.

Lemonfur sighed and rose to her feet, stretching. She sat back down, glancing at her enlarged belly. Ambershine had been right. Her kits really did seem like they would come any day.

Lemonfur shuddered as she felt movement in her stomach. Her kits seemed to really enjoy making her feel uncomfortable. She supposed they'd be born soon though and could annoy her in different ways.

"Good morning, sunshine!" came Thymewhisker's gentle mew from the entrance of the nursery. He padded inside and dropped a plump squirrel at her paws.

Lemonfur eyed him, saying nothing.

"What? Grouchy?" he asked.

Lemonfur sighed. "I just want these kits out of me."

Thymewhisker giggled. "They'll be born soon. Here, we can share the squirrel together while you tell me all about your nursery experience."

Lemonfur sighed and nodded, padding slowly outside with her mate. Together, they sat in the shining sun and munched on a squirrel. The squirrel satisfied her growling stomach, and Lemonfur soon began to feel better.

"Maybe they'll be born today," Thymewhisker whispered.

It made Lemonfur happy to see Thymewhisker was excited to be a father, but it made her feel worse about herself. If he thought being a father was easy and fun, how could she not feel the same?

"Do you think I'll be a good mother?" she asked Thymewhisker quietly after a moment of silence.

Thymewhisker's eyes widened, as if he were confused why she were asking the question.

"I've been thinking about it for awhile," Lemonfur admitted. "It's just, you seem to be so excited to be a father, and I-I'm terrified."

Thymewhisker frowned. "Hey, I may seem excited, but I'm as terrified as you. It's going to be a big change. And don't be so hard on yourself. I know you, Lemonfur, and you're going to make a wonderful mother."

"You think so?" Lemonfur asked.

"I know so," Thymewhisker purred, scooting close to her and licking her cheek.

She smiled, glad to have his reassurance. She purred against him and nuzzled him, glad to have such a loving tom in her life.

"THYMEWHISKER, YOU'RE ON PATROL!" Ashclaw shouted.

Thymewhisker frowned, their moment of silence ruined. "I've got to go. I'll visit you later, okay?"

Lemonfur nodded, her heart sinking as he padded off. She sighed and made her way back into the nursery, settling down back into her nest. Bored, she tossed a moss ball against the den wall like she used to as a kit in the nursery, watching the hours tick by.

At around noon, Lemonfur was startled by the sound of Ashclaw growling angrily.

"And why should we let you in here? How did you make her acquaintance? Is this some trick?!" he growled.

Curious, Lemonfur peeped her head out of the den, spotting Ashclaw growling angrily at two she-cats. At first, Lemonfur thought nothing of it, but getting a better look at the she-cats, she realized they looked exactly like her.

Lemonfur froze, her heart racing. Was the prophecy coming true? Were these cats here to help fulfill it?

Lemonfur rose, about to tell Ashclaw to calm down, when Silverstar swept in between the bickering cats.

"Ashclaw, these cats mean no harm," Silverstar snapped, causing the gray tom to shrink down. "Continue your patrols. I wish to speak to these cats in my den."

"But...Silverstar, they're planning to invade!" he argued.

"That's enough!" one of the she-cats spat. "Have we unsheathed our claws once since coming here?"

"Leave, Ashclaw," Silverstar repeated.

The tom sighed and scurried off, leaving Silverstar with the two she-cats. Catching Silverstar's eye, Lemonfur watched as the leader motioned her forward.

Glancing around, Lemonfur slowly padded towards the two she-cats. Coming closer, she watched as their eyes widened with the same excitement and curiousity that Lemonfur had felt. Approaching them, she realized that they looked the exact same, except one had a collar tied around her neck.

A kittypet, Lemonfur thought, stopping in front of them.

Silverstar stood, glancing at the three. "Into my den. This surely has something to do with the prophecy."

The three obeyed, and Lemonfur slowly trotted behind the others, her heart racing with excitement. Were they finally going to discover the truth?

Ambershine entered moments later and sat down next to Silverstar, her curious eyes scanning the two unknown she-cats.

"I believe we have a lot to discuss," Silverstar began. "You are here to speak of a prophecy, are you not?"

The she-cat without the collar nodded. "Yes. We were going to see if any cats in this forest were a part of the prophecy, though it seems we already found one our first try," she said, turning to face Lemonfur.

"My name is Lifesnow," the she-cat explained, dipping her head. "I'm

a SnowClan warrior."

Lemonfur froze. "You-you're the kit that came down from the sky!"

Lifesnow nodded, though she didn't seem too thrilled to hear the term.

"And I'm Sunrise, a kittypet living in the neighborhood nearby," the one with the collar announced.

"I'm Lemonfur," Lemonfur spoke, dipping her head. "NightClan warrior, er, well, queen, currently."

"We can see that," Lifesnow muttered, laughing to herself. "We hoped you wouldn't give birth during our discussion."

Lemonfur chuckled, though something about Lifesnow's comment bothered her.

"And all of you have heard the prophecy?" Silverstar asked.

Lifesnow nodded, repeating it as if on cue, "As the Moon's shine vanishes and the light burns out, another cat will be lost. Four will come, all the same, but with different stories. The four must unite and rescue the lost cat and theirselves or else the Place of No Stars will gain a star."

Lemonfur shuddered at the familiar words of the prophecy, then turned to Lifesnow. "And do you have information?"

Lifesnow exchanged looks with Sunrise.

"We think we know what it means and what it's dealing with," Lifesnow explained.

Silverstar's face lifted into a smile. "Brilliant! We've had no luck trying to interpret it."

"Lemonfur, were you born here?" Lifesnow asked.

Lemonfur, finding the question odd, shook her head. "No, a warrior found me in NightClan territory after the battle."

"I was found outside a twoleg's home by another cat," Sunrise explained.

"And I came down from the sky. Our appearances at around the same time are connected," Lifesnow began. "My mother's name was Shinypelt, and she was a part of a prophecy too."

Lemonfur nodded, finding the name Shinypelt familiar. She gasped suddenly, realizing this was the cat she'd learned of as a kit in the elders den and the same cat she was referred to in her dreams.

"I've dreamt about her!" she exclaimed.

"You have?!" Lifesnow gasped. "This is good. I've also had visions of her, and so has Sunrise."

"What do you have visions of?" Lemonfur wondered.

"I had visions of her apprenticehood," Sunrise explained.

"And I had dreams of her kithood," Lifesnow added.

"I've had dreams of her as a warrior," Lemonfur spoke.

"I wonder what the other has dreams of," Lifesnow muttered. "Anyway, like I said, Shinypelt was destined to destroy Moonstar in the second battle against MoonClan. We think that Shinypelt was always meant to be reincarnated, but well, something must have happened when Shinypelt went up against Moonstar, because it seems Shinypelt has been reincarnated four times."

Lemonfur nodded, the reincarnation part making sense.

"So far, we've found three of the reincarnations," Lifesnow continued. "There's only one more we need."

"Have you tried the other clans?" Silverstar asked.

"We'll be looking at them later today," Sunrise replied.

"And what will happen when we come together?" Lemonfur wondered.

"I don't know," Lifesnow sighed. "But it has something to do with saving Shinypelt. Lemonfur, you're going to give birth in a few days, so I don't want to trouble you any more with the matter. It won't become important until the fourth is found."

"But I can help find the fourth!" Lemonfur offered.

"No," Ambershine spoke calmly. "You'll have kits to care for, Lemonfur. These cats seem capable. Will you return to us when you have more information?"

"Yes," Lifesnow agreed.

"Then it's settled. We'll speak again when we have more information," Silverstar declared.

Lemonfur nodded, frowning. She wished she could help. They were so close to unveiling the prophecy.

"Good luck to you, Lemonfur," Sunrise purred as she and Lifesnow exited the den, chatting quietly with Silverstar before they departed.

Lemonfur sighed and headed back to the nursery, wanting to know so much more about the prophecy.

By evening, Thymewhisker had come again to visit her, glancing at her with concern.

"Do you feel all right?" he asked. "You look tired."

Lemonfur, barely noticing his presence, nodded. She'd been so preoccupied on thinking about the prophecy that she'd barely moved the rest of the day.

"I'm fine. Just tired from the kits and all," she lied.

Thymewhisker smiled, purring. "Oh, by the way," he suddenly recalled, "Did you see the cats that came today? I heard you were speaking with them."

"Oh, yeah," Lemonfur replied.

Thymewhisker paused. "Well, what were you talking about?"

"Nothing important. Just the whole 'don't come here again' and such. SnowClan cats can be stupid sometimes."

Thymewhisker glanced at her, still confused.

"Well, I'm tired and should probably get some sleep," Lemonfur decided, hoping it'd end the awkward conversation. She knew she needed to tell Thymewhisker soon about the prophecy, but how could she when she was about to give birth in a matter of days?

Thymewhisker, content with this, smiled and nodded, gently nuzzling her as he left the den. Lemonfur was once again left alone, contemplating what her role really was in the prophecy.

Chapter 56

It had been days since Salmon's fallout with Storm. For days she'd been thinking over her feelings over and over again, replaying the scene in her mind. How could Storm possibly love her?

She loved him, and she knew it. And she wanted to tell him she did, but she was unsure how. Instead, she spent a great deal of time in the den, silently admiring the still beautiful cherry blossom that remained from her mother's tree.

It still surprised Salmon to see that the flower had not withered one bit, as if it still possessed life inside of it. She knew her mother's spirit had to be present in that flower, and she protected it carefully, the flower meaning a great deal to her.

As for Storm, he'd been avoiding her. Oak would force them to be together at times, but they often just said nothing or turned the other way, their feelings continuing to be repressed. Salmon wasn't sure how to tell him her feelings, and she wasn't sure if Storm would ever try to speak to her again.

Each night, he'd sit down in the nest beside hers and sleep there quietly. And each night, Salmon would do the same. Their breakfasts together had come to a cease, though at Oak's request, sometimes they'd sit in silence and bite at a small mouse. Other than that, Salmon felt a great deal of awkwardness around her mate and often found herself alone most of the time.

It wasn't until one sunny afternoon that Storm finally caught up to her. Salmon had been basking in the sunlight, trying to warm her fur up as much as she could during the cold day. She hadn't even noticed Storm approach.

The sound of footsteps behind her caused her to turn, and she looked up, watching him standing over her. He did not act dominant over her. In fact, he looked quite frightened to be facing her.

Salmon caught his eye and watched as he gulped, his eyes clearly showing his concern and nerves.

"I-I wanted to apologize for the other day," Storm stammered, moving his eyes away from hers. His eyes were instead fixed on his gray paws, and he continued speaking. "It was not fair for me to make such a confession after how poorly I've treated you. I'm sorry to have concerned you. I know you will never truly feel the same way, but I'm hoping you could at least treat me as if you're impartial toward me. Perhaps then this awkwardness could vanish."

Salmon was taken aback and was unsure of what to say. She gazed at the dark gray tom, biting her lip.

"Storm," she managed to begin.

Storm winced, as if awaiting a long and harsh rant.

"I-I've been meaning to talk to you, too," Salmon said, standing up to face the tom now. He gazed at her with uncertainty, but allowed her to continue.

Salmon glanced around, making sure no cats were near enough to hear their conversation. Then she stared into the tom's green eyes and made her long-awaited confession.

"I love you too," she told him.

The tom paused, severely confused. "What? Did I hear you correctly?"

"You did," Salmon repeated, her heart sinking to see him react in such a poor manner.

"B-but you couldn't. I convinced myself you couldn't. How? After all I've done!" he exclaimed.

"You were foolish and you've apologized," Salmon admitted. "And I'm telling you the truth. Though you never were of interest to me, I truly do love you now. And I'm not saying this because we're forced to be mates or it is what Oak wants. I am generally happy to be acquainted with you."

Storm paused, then his eyes lit up. He took a step forward, unsure if he was coming on too strongly, and nuzzled her gently. Salmon felt her heart melt and purred in satisfaction, never experiencing these strong feelings of affection before.

She smiled at Storm as he drew away and licked his cheek. The tom dissolved in the same fashion as Salmon, and he interlaced his tail with hers.

"Are you sure this is what you want? Will I really make you happy?" he asked.

Salmon dipped her head and nodded. "Yes, Storm."

He smiled warmly, dropping his tail as a sudden screech came from the main den.

Out ran Honey, screeching, "Something is happening inside the den!"

Before any cat could question Honey, light exploded from the main den, and a large draft of wind passed by them, causing Salmon's cherry blossom to fly on top of the current and out of the den.

"No!" Salmon screeched, running to grab the cherry blossom that had been swept free.

The wind was strong though and held her back, and in a moment's notice, the wind died down, and the blossom landed in the center of the tribe's living quarters. Salmon breathed in relief, her heart quickening again as light exploded from the cherry blossom.

Cats yowled in surprise, and even Oak stumbled out of his den, blinking back the bright lights. Storm stood close to Salmon, gasping as the light transformed into the figure of a cat. Salmon gasped, not believing it to be true.

From the cherry blossom came the spirit of her mother, Cherry Blossom. The flower had disappeared, and instead was the figure of a majestic feline with a blossom by her ear, bright light

surrounding her.

"M-Mother?" Salmon stammered. Oak looked just as surprised as Salmon.

They'd all heard stories about cats being present in the object they were named after, even stories about those cats speaking through their objects, but no cat had ever expected this to be true.

"Cats of the tribe!" rang Cherry Blossom's familiar voice, though it was more powerful now than Salmon had imagined. "I bring an important message!"

"Cherry Blossom!" Oak exclaimed, running towards her. Cherry Blossom did not point her head at Oak though. She instead fixed her blinding eyes on Salmon.

"But how can this be?" Salmon whispered. "You're dead."

"Have you not forgotten the ancient tales?!" Cherry Blossom exclaimed, her voice echoing throughout the clearing. "I am certainly not dead as long as the cherry blossoms continue to grow each spring. I know, Salmon, you will ask how this blossom managed to live so long. I have been preserving myself inside it, knowing I will need it to convey a message to you."

"What message?" Salmon asked.

"I speak of the prophecy!" Cherry Blossom exclaimed.

Salmon froze, and the others turned to her in confusion. She had failed to mention to the others about the prophecy.

"I am aware many of you do not know of this matter, but do not blame Salmon, for she has wished to keep it secret. No, I come here today to reveal a bigger secret, one that has been kept from all of you. Salmon is not my daughter."

A gasp of surprise came from the crowd, and Salmon felt her heartbeat quicken. What could she mean? Of course she was Cherry Blossom's daughter!

"But, my dear," Oak interjected. "How could this be so? You gave birth to her!"

"When the great storm separated us, I was indeed pregnant, but my birthing failed, and all of the kits perished. Ashamed, I stumbled upon the newborn Salmon in the forest of clan cats one day. Thinking she could replace the kits I'd lost, I took her as my own and lied. Salmon does not possess any blood of yours, Oak. I am sorry for lying to my fellow tribemates. What I did was wrong, but I certainly believe I made the right choice in caring for this young she-cat."

"SHE SHOULD BE REMOVED FROM THE THRONE!" Cats began to shout these remarks, one after the other, until Cherry Blossom silenced them.

"You are correct. There is no true heir to Oak's bloodline, yet the ruler does get to choose the next heir, and so, he has already chosen Salmon and Storm. Salmon will be the next queen, Storm the next king. There will be no doubt about it," Cherry Blossom sneered, causing the cats to fall back, afraid.

"And now, Salmon, my dear," Cherry Blossom said, turning to her "daughter." "I apologize again for deceiving you, but know it was for the best. As for the prophecy, in order to understand what it means, you must travel to the land of clan cats and learn from them. There, you will be united with the others and fulfill the prophecy."

"But, where do I begin? What does this mean?" Salmon complained.

"Find the clan cats, my dear, and all will make sense..." Cherry Blossom's voice began to fade, and soon, her spirit did as well. As she vanished from view, all that remained was a withered cherry blossom that split into pieces as soon as a cat touched it.

"WHAT IS THE DEAL OF THIS OAK?!" A cat yowled, followed by the response of others. Oak frightened, yowled loudly to quiet the crowd.

"We will do exactly what Cherry Blossom says!" Oak yowled. "Salmon, though she is not my true daughter, will become the next leader. She has been raised to lead, and I see no reason why she shouldn't. Storm continues to remain her mate and next king. As for her quest, are you sure of this, Salmon?"

Salmon nodded, aware she needed to follow Cherry Blossom's advice and seek the clan cats.

"I'll come with her," Storm offered.

Salmon turned, grateful to have him join her on his quest.

Oak dipped his head. "Very well. Storm and Salmon, you'll depart in the morning. If we do not hear from you in one month's time, we will send out search parties. I trust you to return safely."

Salmon nodded, noticing the concern and hurt in her father's eyes. He had just found out he had been lied too, and now, he was sending his only child, who was not even his, away on a dangerous journey.

Salmon glanced at Storm, nervous, but relaxed as he let out a warm smile. She turned and faced the others and made her way to her den, afraid of what was to come on her journey.

Chapter 57

Sunrise awoke to a sunny autumn day in the SnowClan camp. She opened her eyes, glancing around the warriors den. Lifesnow was curled up next to her, cushioned in between Sunrise and her mate, Goosefur. Sunrise watched her sleep peacefully and smiled slightly before rising.

She could count seven days since she had left her home. So far, she had seen no sign of Fawn, Anna, or Frog, and she wondered if Boulder had kept his promise and told them about her. Perhaps they agreed Sunrise should take awhile.

Still, Sunrise was desperate to go home to see the others. She wanted to tell them all about her experience, how it felt to be in a clan, how her dream had nearly come true. Despite all the goodness of staying in SnowClan, she also wanted the prophecy to be fulfilled now. With one cat left, she was desperate to find the last cat of the prophecy and discover her true identity.

Sunrise padded outside and grabbed a mouse from the fresh-kill pile, nibbling on it slightly. The food in SnowClan was much better than the dry cat food she was used to eating at home, and she wondered if she'd ever be able to go back to eating her old food after being spoiled like this.

Going back...Sunrise hadn't thought about it too much. Would she go back to her kittypet life? Or would Thornstar allow her to stay and be a warrior? Either way, Sunrise wasn't sure what she wanted. She'd always wanted to be a warrior, but she wasn't so much pleased about leaving her friends behind.

Sunrise watched as some cats eyed her as she ate her breakfast. That was another thing about being taken into SnowClan camp. While many cats were very kind toward her, it was obvious she was ranked below them, and many eyed her with suspicion, wondering if she was just taking advantage of their hospitality.

Sunrise had told Lifesnow this issue, but Lifesnow had only shooed it off, assuring her that the cats just didn't understand how important she meant to everyone at SnowClan. Despite these kind words, Sunrise still felt like she was prejudiced.

Licking up the remainder of her mouse, Sunrise noticed

Lifesnow exiting the den with Goosefur by her side. Lifesnow happily trotted up to Sunrise and sat down across from her. Goosefur grabbed a squirrel for him and his mate to share, then joined them.

"Good morning," Lifesnow spoke gladly.

"Morning," Sunrise replied in a less ecstatic manner.

"Already eat breakfast?" Lifesnow wondered.

Sunrise nodded.

"Hey, Goosefur and I are heading out on patrol this morning. You're welcome to come," Lifesnow suggested.

Sunrise felt her stomach clench. She glanced down at her white and golden speckled paws, refusing to make eye contact. "I-I don't know. I don't think I'd be much help..."

"Sure you would!" Lifesnow assured her. Goosefur, his mouth full of squirrel, nodded beside her.

"What could I even do?" Sunrise wondered.

"Well, we're just patrolling the border, keeping an eye out for other cats trespassing, marking borders and such," Lifesnow explained. As she continued, Sunrise felt even more nervous and out of place. She didn't understand half the terms Lifesnow was mentioning.

"I think I'd rather stay here," she decided.

Lifesnow frowned but did not press Sunrise any further. "Well, okay then. We'll be back soon," she told her as she and Goosefur rose. Together, they trotted off, leaving Sunrise alone in the SnowClan camp once again.

Unsure of what to do, Sunrise laid down in a sunny spot near the warriors den, letting the sun warm her fur as a gentle autumn breeze swept by. She watched other cats trot by and eye her. Sunrise wanted to hide herself in embarassment.

When the fifth cat glanced at her, Sunrise stood up and angrily trotted towards Thornstar's den, wishing the other clan members would just leave her alone. She wasn't trying to take advantage of any cat's hospitality. She was merely here for prophecy purposes.

Marching towards the leader's den, Sunrise stopped in her tracks, unsure of what she was even going to tell Thornstar. It wasn't like she could complain. He was offering her shelter, food, a temporary home. How could she complain?

Sighing, Sunrise was about to turn away when Thornstar

padded out of his den.

"Oh, Sunrise, hello," he called, padding up next to her. "I thought you went on patrol with Lifesnow and Goosefur."

"Uh, I slept in," Sunrise lied, not wanting to tell him the true reason.

The golden-brown tabby eyed her oddly but did not question her.

"I-I think I'll go on a walk in the woods, if that's all right with you," Sunrise suggested.

Thornstar nodded happily. "Of course. Do you know your way around?"

Sunrise nodded, recalling how she and Lifesnow often took a familiar walk through the territory. She wouldn't stray too far.

Waving good-bye to Thornstar, she padded into the SnowClan forest, glad to be away from the camp. Out here in the woods, she could be herself, free from any strange looks.

Walking on the familiar path, Sunrise glanced around, recognizing certain landmarks in the forest that helped her keep track of where she was. Lifesnow needed only to use her nose, but Sunrise still hadn't mastered that yet. She remembered being overwhelmed with all the scents when she had first arrived. Still, she could barely distinguish Lifesnow's scent from Thornstar's.

Lifesnow had told her it would take practice, but Sunrise doubted she'd be able to master distinguishing scents in the short amount of time she stayed here.

Noticing a wooden stump up ahead, Sunrise sat down against the stump, wondering if maybe it would just be best to return home. Lifesnow could fetch her when they found the last cat. She was desperate to see her friends again.

Sunrise traced her paws in the dirt, wondering how her owner was dealing with her disappearance. She hoped they hadn't replaced her with another cat...

But if I want to be a warrior, I shouldn't worry about my home, Sunrise thought. She knew no cat had even offered to allow her to become a warrior, but the thought still remained in her mind.

Carried away in her thoughts, she jumped at the sound of a twig being cracked. Looking up, Sunrise saw a dark gray tom and white and golden she-cat walking forward slowly and cautiously. At first, she mistakened them for Lifesnow and Goosefur. But she knew better. These cats looked as if they weren't from around her.

When the she-cat's eyes fell on Sunrise, she stopped in her tracks.

"Excuse me," she spoke quietly. "Are you...you look like me."

Sunrise rose, surprised. Was this the last cat of the prophecy? She was too stunned to speak.

"Are there clans nearby?" the tom asked. "We're trying to find the clans."

Sunrise gulped and nodded. "Y-Yes. Are you, by any chance, a part of a prophecy?"

The she-cat froze, then nodded. "Are you part of it too?"

Sunrise nodded, then sprang into the air in excitement. "Oh, yes! Yes! The prophecy is complete! We've found every cat!" she explained, hopping around. The two cats glanced at her oddly, speaking not a word.

"I'm Sunrise," she said to the she-cat. "Who are you?"

The she-cat glanced at her oddly. "I didn't think Sunrise was a clan name, and I didn't think clan cats wore collars. My name is Salmon, and this is my mate, Storm. We've traveled far from Oak's tribe. Perhaps you've heard of it?"

Sunrise shook her head. "I'm merely a housecat. But maybe the others have heard of it. You are in the forest of clans though. I'm just staying at this clan while we searched for the last cat."

"You mean you've found the other two?" Salmon wondered.

Sunrise nodded. "One is in this clan, SnowClan. The other is in the clan nearby, NightClan. We were so eager to find the last cat. But now you're here! You'll have to come back with us to camp! Thornstar will be so excited!"

"Are you sure it's safe?" Storm asked. "We don't want to trespass any more."

"They'll accept you easily," Sunrise assured them. "Follow me."

She watched as Storm and Salmon hesitantly followed her through the forest. Sunrise easily retracted her steps, coming closer to camp.

Salmon lifted her nose to the air and spoke. "I've never smelled so many cats before."

"It's a big clan," Sunrise admitted. "Come on!" she called, beginning to run now. The others ran after her, and at last, she entered the camp, coming to a halt.

Immediately, cats turned towards the two new strange cats,

throwing even more odd glances at Sunrise. Ignoring them, Sunrise led Storm and Salmon through the crowd of cats toward Thornstar's den.

"The kittypet has brought back friends!" a cat shouted. Other cats began to whisper among themselves, and Sunrise kept her head down as she entered Thornstar's den.

"Thornstar!" she shouted, causing the tom to jump. He spun around, gasping as his eyes fell on Salmon and Storm.

"That's not Goosefur and Lifesnow, is it?" he asked.

"Who?" Storm wondered.

Sunrise ignored his question. "This is is Salmon and Storm. They've traveled from a tribe far away. Salmon is the last cat in the prophecy!"

Thornstar's eyes widened. "Why, this is fabulous!" he exclaimed, rushing to greet the couple. "My name is Thornstar, leader of SnowClan. I believe the information we've put together will help you. Just let me gather Lifesnow. She's another cat in the prophecy. Oh, we'll have to contact Lemonfur too!"

Sunrise stood, her heart beating with excitement. Finally, it was coming all together.

Chapter 58

Lemonfur sat in Ambershine's den, watching awkwardly as the calico she-cat slowly circled around her, observing her swollen stomach. She gently pressed her paw to Lemonfur's side, causing a slight kick to erupt.

"Ouch," Lemonfur snapped.

"What? It's not my fault," Ambershine argued, sitting down. "I was hoping maybe that would induce your labor," she joked.

"Ha-ha," Lemonfur replied, sitting down. She'd been grouchy for days, spending her time moping around the NightClan camp.

She'd heard no word yet from Lifesnow and Sunrise, and she was supposed to have given birth a week before. But still, her kits remained unborn and the prophecy unresolved. Lemonfur was getting a bit tired of waiting.

"Well, I guess it'll just happen eventually," Ambershine decided. "You're obviously on the verge of giving birth. I wouldn't be surprised if it happened at any second."

"Well, I want them out," Lemonfur complained.

Ambershine grinned. "If only I knew what the pains of being a mother were like," she joked.

"You're lucky you took an oath of having no mate or kits," Lemonfur explained.

Ambershine laughed. "You're definitely acting like a grouchy queen. Just relax and head to the nursery," she advised her. "When you go into labor, which could happen at any time, we want you to be secure in your nest. I don't want you going out and about."

Lemonfur rolled her eyes. "Not even to stretch my legs?"

"If you need to make dirt then go ahead. What I mean is, you shouldn't be going through the forest alone or going to places you shouldn't be," Ambershine warned, eyeing Lemonfur.

"What?!" Lemonfur complained, though she knew Ambershine saw through her innocence. Just the other day, a NightClan patrol had caught her near the SnowClan border. She had been hoping to sneak across to speak to Lifesnow and Thornstar, but cats had noticed quickly her absence in the nursery. Thymewhisker had been furious to know she'd been out.

Besides feeling guilty about that incident, Lemonfur still hadn't told Thymewhisker about the prophecy, deciding it wouldn't be best until after the kits were born. He'd been stressed enough as it was, worried that the kits coming late was a sign that something was wrong. Ambershine assured him it was the exact opposite, that it was better later than earlier, but Thymewhisker still could not be calmed. Silverstar had assigned him on extra patrols to reduce his anxiety, though Lemonfur guessed it had only made it worse.

Ambershine led Lemonfur back to the nursery where Lemonfur curled back into her nest where soon tiny kits would occupy it. As Ambershine left, Lemonfur realized she had been so focused on the prophecy, she hadn't really thought too much into being a mother.

She assumed as soon as the kits were born, she'd be ready to assist the other cats. But kits were a lot of work, and from what Ambershine explained, it sounded like Lemonfur was having more than one.

"Please don't be five," Lemonfur whispered, thinking of Thymewhisker and his siblings. How had his mother handled all of them? Frostflight could barely control only her.

Being a mother was as terrifying as solving the prophecy, and Lemonfur grew more anxious each day. Her fur had grown wild and ragged. Ambershine described it as pre-birthing stress, but Lemonfur knew the anxiety from having kits and the prophecy had contributed to her unfavorable appearance.

The sound of cats coming into the camp grabbed Lemonfur's

attention. She glanced up, hoping to see Lifesnow and Sunrise, but it was only a mere returning patrol. And from the frantic footsteps, she knew Thymewhisker was on it.

He rushed into the nursery, sighing in relief.

"Phew, you're still pregnant," he noted, glancing at her swollen stomach.

"Gee, thanks," Lemonfur responded grouchily.

"Sorry. I didn't want to miss the birth," he admitted.

"And you won't," Lemonfur assured him. "Relax."

"You know I can't," Thymewhisker sighed. "What if something goes wrong? What if I'm not a good father?"

That's your only worries, Lemonfur thought. But she couldn't be hard on Thymewhisker. He'd gone through temporary muteness, which was surely worse than Lemonfur's situation.

"Hey, you'll be fine. I promise that if I go into labor, I'll wait for you, okay?" Lemonfur promised.

Thymewhisker chuckled to himself and licked her ear. Hearing his name, he glanced up.

"That's Raspberryblaze," he noted, waving his tail to his sister. "I got to go."

"See you," Lemonfur sighed.

"Maybe I'll be a father by the end of the day!" Thymewhisker exclaimed, hopping off.

"Maybe," Lemonfur replied so quietly he couldn't hear.

For awhile, she laid there, getting a short visit from her siblings, who were checking on her health. They chatted quietly for awhile, then like Thymewhisker, dispersed to perform other warrior duties. Lemonfur longed to be a warrior again, though she knew it'd be

another six moons in the nursery before she was able to step back on patrols.

Around mid-day, there was a commotion among the NightClan members. Despite Ambershine's request, Lemonfur rose and peeked her head out of the nursery, gasping in surprise to see a white and gray tom rushing into camp with Silverstar by his side.

Lemonfur gasped, wondering if perhaps this was a message from SnowClan and the third had been found. She longed to get up and rush to her leader and the tom, but alas, she decided to obey Ambershine's orders.

Laying back down in her nest, she was happy to find Silverstar enter with the tom and Ambershine moments later.

"I need this den cleared immediately," Silverstar ordered.

The other she-cats glanced at their leader in confusion, but they did not hesitate to obey her orders. Hustling their kits along, the kits whispered among themselves about the strange-smelling tom, then resumed their games outside.

When the den was clear, Silverstar ordered the tom to sit. Sitting in a circle, Lemonfur glanced in confusion.

The tom was out of breath, as if he'd been running to NightClan.

"The-the fourth has been found!" he exclaimed.

Lemonfur's eyes widened. "Is it certain?"

He nodded.

"I ran into Patchfur during patrol," Silverstar exclaimed.

"I was Shinypelt's mate," Patchfur explained. "You've heard their theory, haven't you?"

Lemonfur nodded, feeling odd around the tom. If she were a reincarnation of Shinypelt, would this technically make him her mate? She shuddered at the thought. Still, she definitely recognized

him from her dreams of Shinypelt's warriorhood. He'd been a constant presence, always hunting with her, going on patrols with her. He didn't feel too much like a stranger.

"Thornstar wants Lemonfur to come immediately," Patchfur explained. "It's important that the four are united."

Lemonfur was about to speak up when Ambershine spoke.

"Absolutely not! Can't you see she's about to give birth? If she takes one step she'll go into labor!" Ambershine argued.

"Ambershine," Lemonfur began.

"It's vital she comes!" Patchfur urged.

"Could they not come to NightClan?" Silverstar asked calmly.

"Thornstar says she must come to SnowClan. After all, if the theory is correct, SnowClan was Shinypelt's home, and the prophecy best be fulfilled there."

"But NightClan is also a part of the prophecy," Ambershine pointed out.

"Patchfur's reasoning makes sense. It cannot be done here then," Silverstar sighed.

"I can go!" Lemonfur argued.

"You may not. You'll give birth in the woods," Ambershine snapped.

"Enough fighting!" Silverstar growled.

Lemonfur flinched, never seeing her leader angry before. Both she and Ambershine fell quiet, and Patchfur glanced at them awkwardly.

"I'm sorry, Patchfur, but we cannot fulfill Thornstar's request until Lemonfur has given birth and the kits are old enough to be without her. It may be as much as a moon."

"A moon?!" Patchfur exclaimed. "But-but..."

"It may be a moon," Silverstar spoke firmly. "And it may not. Please relay this message onto your leader. If he has any concerns, he may speak to me directly. We must keep in mind the health of Lemonfur. She is one of my warriors and therefore my responsibility. I am sure Thornstar would not put one of his own warriors in danger."

Patchfur sighed and dipped his head. "Very well. I will relay the message." With those words, he exited the den, Silverstar returning him. Ambershine turned her head towards Lemonfur, as if already knowing her plan.

"Not a muscle will be moved, you hear?!" Ambershine exclaimed.

"I know," Lemonfur groaned.

The she-cat quickly left, and the queens and kits entered into the den again. Lemonfur consistently glanced out of the den, checking to see if the coast were clear, but each time, she could see Ambershine sitting outside her den, glancing around.

Lemonfur supposed she wouldn't be able to sneak out at all when fortunately an apprentice limped into camp with a sprained paw. She could see the nervousness in Ambershine's face, but she of course had to take him in and inspect him.

Turning to one of the queens, Lemonfur spoke, "I'm going to make dirt."

The she-cat glanced at her oddly but nodded. Lemonfur bit her lip as she stepped out of camp. Going straight through was not an option. Instead, she turned and slipped into the bushes behind the den.

She struggled through with her swollen belly, and when a kick came, she feared she was going into labor. Thankfully, it subsided, and she emerged on the other side in NightClan territory. Knowing her absence would be noticed quickly, she began speedwalking through the forest, trying to take all the routes that the patrols would not take. Going on patrols so frequently had

aided her, and she easily avoided any patrols that were out.

At one point, she picked up the scent of a warrior and apprentice, but they had recently left, and she slipped by easily. She padded through the autumn woods quickly, praying she wouldn't break into labor here.

Coming to the SnowClan border, she sighed in relief. Turning her head, she saw the coast was clear and slipped inside. She was no more than five minutes into the territory when a patrol caught her.

"What's a pregnant NightClan cat doing here?!" a white tom sneered.

"Marshshadow, leave her be!" a storm gray tom, whom Lemonfur recognized as Goosefur, spoke. "Thornstar's been wanting her. Lemonfur, come this way."

Marshshadow was confused, as well as the rest of the cats, but Goosefur quickly led Lemonfur towards the SnowClan camp.

"You shouldn't be out here," he whispered. "You look as if you're about to give birth."

"I'll be fine," Lemonfur assured him. "Thornstar wanted to see me immediately, yes?"

"Yes, but Patchfur said you weren't coming," Goosefur replied.

"Well, the decision was changed. I was well enough to come."

"You decided this, or your leader?"

"Silverstar did," Lemonfur lied. She felt guilty, but she knew this was incredibly important and could certainly not be delayed a moon.

"We're almost here," Goosefur spoke.

Lemonfur nodded, though an odd feeling had begun to rise in her stomach. She tried to push it away and ignore the small sting of pain, but something was off.

Oh, please not now, she thought, wincing.

"You okay?" Goosefur asked, noticing her pain.

"Fine," Lemonfur lied, catching up to him. As soon as she stepped into the sunlit camp, however, she let out a yowl in pain.

"Lemonfur!" Goosefur gasped.

Lemonfur immediately sat down, panting heavily. The extreme pain in her belly could only mean one thing.

"My kits are coming!" she yowled.

Chapter 59

As soon as Lemonfur's scream echoed throughout the SnowClan camp, Lifesnow pricked her ears and popped her head out of the warriors den where Sunrise and Salmon followed. All were in alarm to see the young she-cat yowling in pain as she laid on the ground.

"MY KITS ARE COMING!" she yowled again, louder and in more pain.

Already, Spiritheart and Ripplepaw had burst out of then, Thornstar following. Realizing she needed to help, Lifesnow was the first to step out of the den and rush towards the she-cat. Salmon and Sunrise quickly followed behind.

Lifesnow only came to a halt when the clear blue sky suddenly began to turn gray. The sun quickly vanished beneath the clouds, and all sunlight was blocked. A light breeze began to sweep up, and Lifesnow felt herself shivering.

Her paws tingled, and she knew something was coming.

"It's happening," she heard Thornstar gasp.

"WHAT'S GOING ON?!" Patchfur yowled, leaping out of the den. But all the cats had fallen silent. Even Lemonfur's screams had come to a cease.

From the darkened sky came a flash of lightning, and when it had cleared, Moonstar sat in the center of SnowClan camp, her eyes flashing a deep red as she turned to face the cats.

Lifesnow shuddered. She'd never seen the she-cat before, but she'd heard enough stories. This was the cat who was responsible for her mother's death, for the scars on Stormpelt and Graytail.

Salmon and Sunrise, though they'd never known too much of Moonstar, seemed just as frightened.

From what Lifesnow could see, Lemonfur also looked terrified and let out a squeal of other pain or fright.

"Moonstar," Thornstar growled, unsheathing his claws.

"B-But, she should be gone," Patchfur argued. "Shinypelt-"

"Shinypelt failed!" the ominous figure snapped. "Yes, StarClan's powers were meant to vanish me forever...even from the Dark Forest, but alas, I still wander those dark woods, though I may not be as strong. But I felt a presence here today," the silver-blue she-cat purred, her eyes falling directly on Lifesnow, Sunrise, and Salmon.

"Are these cats supposed to stop me?" she asked, pointing at them and laughing.

No cat spoke, each of them frozen with fear as Moonstar approached. She turned, laughing harder at Lemonfur. "And it looks like one of them has gone into labor. So unfortunate that StarClan's plans have failed again."

Lemonfur let out a growl, then winced in pain once again. Spiritheart and Ripplepaw were by her side, trying to coax her.

Lifesnow gulped and shut her eyes, suddenly knowing what she had to do.

"We can still stop her," she told Salmon and Sunrise.

"What? How?" Salmon asked. "Lemonfur can't even move."

Lifesnow ignored them and stood up, embracing Moonstar. "You're wrong. We can stop you!" she snarled. "We can finish what Shinypelt did not."

"Lies," Moonstar growled, unsheathing her razor sharp claws. Lifesnow gulped, then watched Lemonfur struggle.

"No, you can't move," Ripplepaw urged. "You must wait until--"

"I'm fine!" Lemonfur snapped, slowly rising to her feet. She limped forward towards the others, and quickly, Lifesnow ran towards the she-cat, Sunrise and Salmon rushing behind. Before Moonstar could even react, Lifesnow pressed her nose against Lemonfur's, feeling a spark of energy. As if on cue, Salmon and Sunrise joined in, and a feeling of light and surge of power rose through Lifesnow. She truly felt StarClan within her. This is what it meant for the four cats to come together. This was how Moonstar would be defeated and how the prophecy would prevail.
Moonstar shrieked as a blinding light began shining around them.

I'm doing this for you, mother, Lifesnow thought, releasing every amount of energy she had. The others did the same, and soon, their powers erupted in a blinding light that flashed throughout the entire forest. All at once, Lifesnow felt all of Shinypelt's visions come to her and watched as her life flashed by. And then, the memories began to disappear one by one until she faded into nothing.

When the SnowClan cats had regained their vision, Moonstar had vanished, as had the four she-cats.

"Is-is she gone?" Thornstar asked, looking around for the deadly she-cat.

Before any cat could question, a blue light dazzled above their heads, similar to what it had done before after Shinypelt's sacrifice. Cats gazed up, trying to see through the blinding light. Suddenly, the body of a she-cat twirled down from the sky and was let down gently onto the earth.

Patchfur, unsure of which cat it was, sprang towards the limp body and stopped by the she-cat's side, recognizing her white and golden pelt. At first, he believed it to be Lifesnow, but something was different.

"Sh-Shinypelt?" Patchfur stammered. It couldn't be his old mate.

The white and golden she-cat opened her eyes to reveal the shimmering blue eyes he had once fallen in love with.

"Patchfur!" she exclaimed, rising to her feet in a jovial manner. She nuzzled the tom affectionately. "I've missed you, my dear."

Patchfur purred and nuzzled her further. "I've missed you too," he whispered in her ear. Suddenly, he froze.

"Lifesnow...where's Lifesnow?!" Patchfur gasped, so caught up in seeing his dead mate again that he had failed to think of his own daughter.

Shinypelt only smiled and looked up. The light still remained, and slowly, more she-cats floated down from the sky.

A white and golden she-cat fell slowly, landing on the ground. She opened her eyes slowly, and Patchfur immediately recognized the she-cat as Lifesnow. He ran to his daughter's side, assisting her up. She glanced around, clearly confused and exhausted.

On the edge of the camp, Silverstar had appeared with an anxious Thymewhisker and Raspberryblaze, and on the other side stood Frog, Anna, Fawn, and Boulder, all watching the spectacle with curiosity.

Following Lifesnow was a pure white she-cat. As her paws touched the ground, her eyes opened to reveal a bright green color.

The she-cat, opening opening her eyes and seeing her pure white coat, gasped. "What-what happened?"

Lifesnow, still wondering why she was suddenly having visions of Shinypelt beside her, recognized the voice as Salmon's.

Before Salmon could speak further, she glanced up, watching as a gray tabby she-cat floated to the ground, her collar still wrapped tightly around her neck. When her eyes opened, they were a bright amber.

"Sunrise," Salmon whispered.

Lastly, a ginger tabby she-cat came down, and on all sides of her were four kits that floated down beside her.

"It's Lemonfur," Lifesnow gasped.

The four cats slowly regained their senses, confused as ever. Smiling, Shinypelt slowly approached to embrace the four she-cats.

"M-Mom? You're alive!" Lifesnow gasped in surprise, realizing that this Shinypelt was real. She rushed towards the she-cat, shoving her head in her mother's warm chest. She'd longed to feel her mother's presence since she was a kit, and now, she was here, pressing against her.

"I'm here," Shinypelt whispered, licking the top of Lifesnow's head. Tears gathered in her eyes. "You're so beautiful...all of you."

"I-I don't understand," Sunrise stammered. "What happened? Are you Shinypelt? Who are we?"

"It is a fact well known that upon my sacrifice to the clans, I failed in succeeding. My powers were supposed to destroy Moonstar, but when StarClan was planning to reincarnate my soul, their powers accidentally mixed with the Dark Forest, thus creating four reincarnations instead of one. Lifesnow, you are the true reincarnation, which is why your appearance remains so similar to mine. However, when you four came together, your powers brought me back, which is why none of you have the memories of my life that you previously possessed.

"About your pelt colors. This is the strangest part of the entire affair. No, I was not pregnant at the time of my 'death,' but technically speaking, you four reincarnations are Patchfur's and my kits. It is confusing, I know, but it is why some of you have similar pelt colors to us. For, if you are reincarnations, you'd have to have some parents, right?"

"R-Right," Lifesnow nodded, confused. So these cats...were her sisters? She glanced at them joyfully. She had a family she'd never had before.

"Which is why," Shinypelt continued, glancing at Patchfur. "I invite all of you to remain here in SnowClan. You are true SnowClan cats, and I'm sure Thornstar would happily accept you into the clan. This

decision is up to you, however. I understand you most likely have other cats you are loyal to. But if you wish to live with your family, then I invite you to stay."

Lifesnow nodded and stood up to join her mother and father, waiting for her sisters to make their decision.

Salmon glanced down at her pure white pelt, guessing the name "Salmon," didn't fit much anymore. She wasn't sure how she'd explain this to her father or the other cats in her tribe.

"Oh, yes, my pelt just randomly changed color," she would tell them. They'd kill her almost immediately.

I'm overreacting, Salmon thought, knowing the others had been able to recognize her just fine.
But now she had a decision ahead of her, one she had never planned to make. These were her blood-parents: Patchfur and Shinypelt. They seemed very nice, and for a moment, Salmon was almost tempted to join them.

She then glanced over at Storm, who looked at her calmly, and she knew he was allowing her to make the decision herself.

She had a mother, and her name was Cherry Blossom. Her father, Oak, was anxiously awaiting her return. This experience had definitely given her a taste of clan life, but it was not enough to tempt her to join.

"Your offer is very kind," Salmon began, breaking off the silence. "But I cannot accept it. I am not qualified to be a clan cat, and...I plan to lead my own tribe with my mate, Storm. But once again, I thank you, and wish it could've come to a better compromise."

Shinypelt still smiled, though Lifesnow looked a little hurt.

"I understand, Salmon. I know this must be hard for you to know you now have a family with sisters and parents. But as my daughter, I want you to know that I wish you luck and hope to see you again."

"Thank you," Salmon purred, bowing her head to Shinypelt and her

father, Patchfur, from whom she guessed she inherited his bright green eyes.

She turned back to look at Storm, who smiled warmly. It was time to go home.

Sunrise was in utter shock. Besides the fact her pelt color had changed so suddenly, she was now given the option that she had longed for since she was a mere kit. But...she found herself so unwilling to accept it.

Sunrise glanced over at her friends, who looked at her eagerly. They were expecting her to snatch up the offer upon her first word.

Sunrise sighed, thinking of how tbe others had treated her since she'd been here. She thought of the boy who cared for her. And her friends...would she ever see them again?

"I-I also cannot accept," Sunrise stammered.

She glanced over at the others. Fawn and Frog looked shocked, Anna seemed indifferent, and Boulder looked pleased, almost.

"But, Sunrise! You've always wanted this!" Fawn shouted.

Sunrise shook her head. "I wanted a feeling of clan life, I wanted an identity, and I achieved that. Now, I can boast about my clan bloodline, but that doesn't change my decision. I learned upon arriving here that clan life, while it seemed exciting moons ago, is not for me. I also want to be with my friends and my owners who care for me. They show me more love than I deserve, and I couldn't abandon them. But I will try to visit often, for I want to see my other family sometime," Sunrise spoke.

Shinypelt smiled, and Lifesnow looked as if she had tears in her eyes. Lifesnow rushed to her sister and embraced her.

"Visit as often as you can!" Lifesnow exclaimed.

"I will. Thank you all so much for your hospitality, but I too should be going," Sunrise decided. After quick good-byes to the others, she joined her pack of kittypets and disappeared itno the woods,

leaving SnowClan behind.

"I'm shocked you decided to ditch their offer," Frog admitted.

"I couldn't leave you guys. I love kittypet life just as it is," Sunrise purred.

"Your pelt color...I like it like this," Boulder purred.

She looked away, blushing. "Thanks, but what will my owners think?"

"I think they assumed you were hit by a car awhile ago," Anna explained. "But I'm sure we could rip that collar off and place you on their porch. It seemed like they were looking for a replacement."

Sunrise smiled. "That'd be perfect."

She then padded off with her friends happily, SnowClan and her family still distant in her mind.

Lemonfur was all that remained, her mind swarming as she thought of her kits who suckled beside her and her friends and family. The choice was obvious.

"I think it is obvious I can't accept," Lemonfur spoke, unable to get up. She didn't want to upset her newborn kits. "I have a family of my own, and I must care for them. SnowClan will remain dear to my heart, but I am a NightClan cat through and through. I still will show kindness and generosity towards my SnowClan family."

"I understand," Shinypelt spoke. "I did not expect any to join. It was only an offer. I wish you good luck raising your children, Lemonfur. I think we'll leave you now with your mate. You still have to name those kits, don't you?"

Lemonfur smiled, watching as Shinypelt, Patchfur, and Lifesnow happily padded away. The SnowClan medicine cat and medicine cat apprentice still stood by her side, making sure the kits were okay.

Thymewhisker ran immediately to Lemonfur, rubbing his cheek against hers. Raspberryblaze and Silverstar followed behind.

"Why didn't you tell us you were a part of a prophecy?" Thymewhisker asked, concerned.
Lemonfur glanced up at Silverstar, who looked guilty.

"I had to explain on the way," Silverstar admitted.

"I-I couldn't," Lemonfur sighed. "Not with your condition, and then I was pregnant, and there was too much going on to tell you. I'm so sorry. I desperately wanted to, but I just couldn't find the time. Do you forgive me?" she asked both Raspberryblaze and Thymewhisker.

"Of course we do," Raspberryblaze argued. "Right?"

Thymewhisker nodded. "Why would we be mad? You helped rescue the clans from Moonstar's eventual return. I'm proud of you."

Lemonfur smiled.

"It's odd seeing your pelt color just solid ginger," Raspberryblaze pointed out.

"It's odd, I suppose," Lemonfur admitted. "But at least I had ginger in my coat before. What will the others think?"

"I'm sure they'll love it," Thymewhisker purred, looking over at the four kits. "And these are ours?"

Lemonfur nodded.

"Three toms and one she-cat," the SnowClan medicine cat apprentice announced.

"What should we name them?" Thymewhisker asked.

Lemonfur glanced first at the ginger tabby tom who suckled from her side. He looked the most like Lemonfur, now that the white had been removed from her pelt.

"We can call him Foxkit," she decided.

"What a great name," Thymewhisker purred. He glanced over at the

silver tabby tom that resembled his pelt color.

"Can we call him Thunderkit?" he asked.

Lemonfur nodded. "That's a great name," she agreed, her eyes falling on the one light ginger she-cat.

"And we can call her Lightningkit," she decided. "You name the last one," she told Thymewhisker.

Thymewhisker glanced at the dark gray tabby tom. "He can be Wolfkit," he decided.

"What a beautiful family," Raspberryblaze observed.

"Four kits. It'll be tough," Lemonfur admitted.

"But I'll be right there by yout side," Thymewhisker purred. Lemonfur smiled, glancing over at the group of SnowClan cats she

had not joined. But it didn't bother her. Now, she had a complete past, a full story, and it would continue in NightClan as her and Thymewhisker's kits grew.

Author's Note

Dear Reader,

Thank you so much for reading *Shining of the Four!* I honestly did not expect so much from success from this book. It's my third most read Warriors novel! Thank you guys so much for this accomplishment! Without your encouraging comments, likes, and reads, I would never be able to do the stuff I do.

This book was honestly so much fun to write, and I'm glad many of you found much joy in it. Truth be told, this was my *favorite* Warriors fanfic to write, and I think it's one of my best-written ones. (Wait, what? You think this is better than *The Abandoned Warrior?!*) Yeah. Even I think my own novel is overrated.

This is only a single novel though, so no sequel for those who will ask. I hope you found the story enjoyable and likable.

Be sure to check out some of my other Warriors novels, especially some of the newer ones that are better written yet don't get much recognition.

Thank you again!

~Maeve